

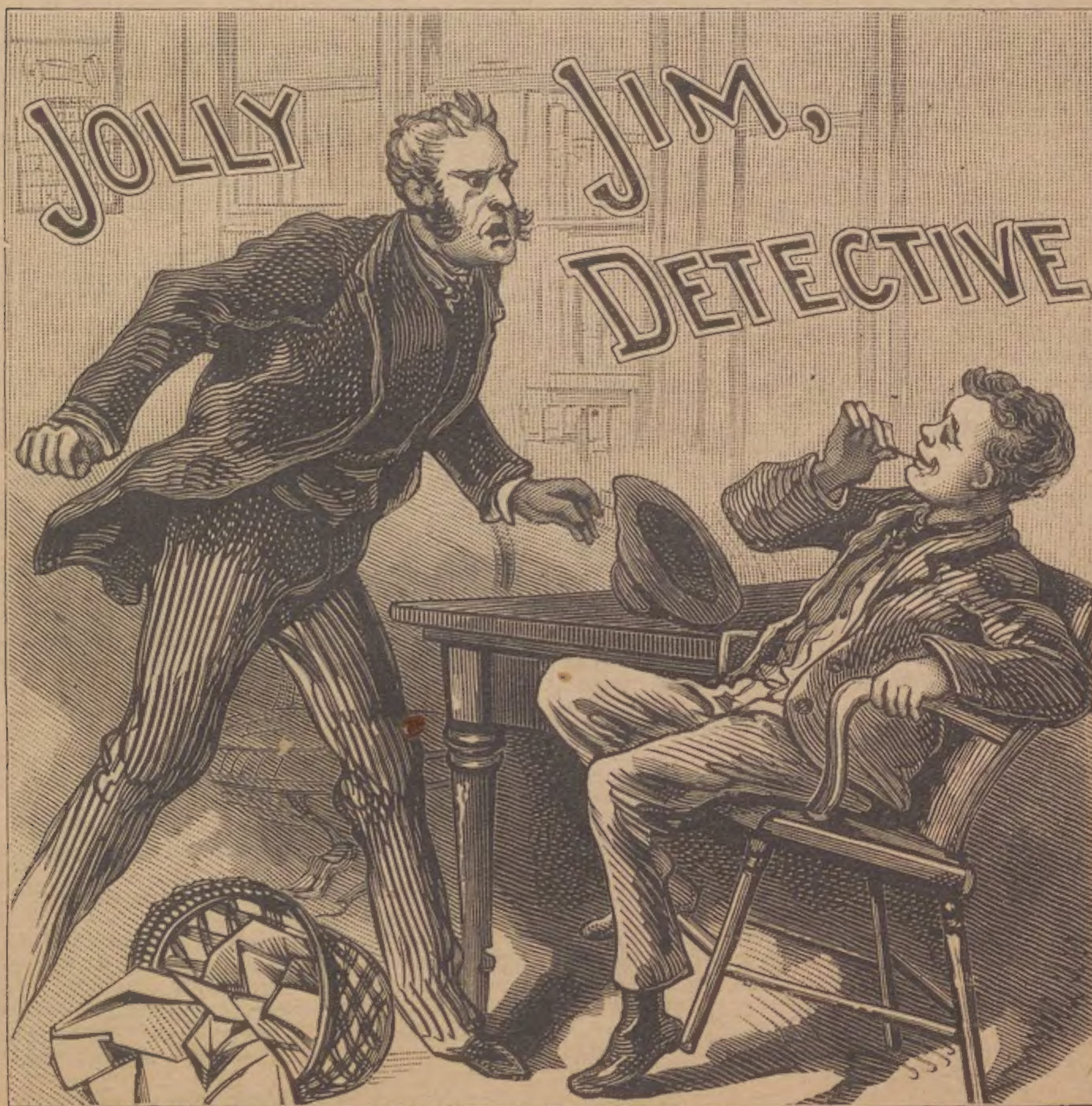
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"THEN GET OUT, YOU IMPUDENT YOUNG HOUND! UP FROM THAT CHAIR, AND OFF WITH YOU, BEFORE I KICK YOU OUT!"

Jolly Jim, Detective;

OR,

The Young Protege's Victory.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "NEWSBOY NED," "THE DANDY DETECTIVE," "CRACK-SHOT FRANK," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A PROFESSIONAL CALL.

IN an easy-chair in his office sat Mr. Paul Wilkins, a well-to-do merchant, whose establishment stood on a street in the busiest wholesale region of New York. Although signs of prosperity were visible everywhere around him, he seemed himself far from easy in his mind.

"It's confoundedly aggravating," he declared. "After I'd got everything in shape, for luck to turn on me in this style. But, by Jove, they shall not do for me! Paul Wilkins was never defeated yet, and by all that's good I'll have that brat again, though I hate it as I hate poison!"

His firm lips clinched like iron. His eyes had a steely glare. It was the face of a man of hard, unflinching nature, without a spark of human sympathy in his soul.

"Why don't that fellow come?" he sourly grumbled. "Hang them, do they think they can play with me? These rascally detectives shall find that they have no baby to deal with when they get hold of me. I'll teach them that when they undertake my work it is me they are working for, not themselves."

As he spoke the door of the office opened, and a figure of marked appearance entered. It was a boy, of perhaps eighteen years of age, yet short for his age, though stout and well-set in figure. He was dressed in a suit which had done duty quite long enough to be retired, but which the boy wore with as much careless ease as though he was dressed in the pink of the mode.

The boy stood with his hands in his pockets, and his legs well planted, looking around him with keen eyes that seemed to take in all the surroundings at a glance.

The merchant's frown grew deeper, as he looked at this nonchalant visitor.

"Who in the deuce are you?" he at length ejaculated, in an angry tone. "What do you want? If you are begging, you had best try some other quarters. And if you want to steal I'd advise you not to practice here. Come, booby, what do you want?"

"Not to beg nor to steal," answered the boy, with easy assurance, as he threw his hat on the table, and helped himself to a chair. "'Scuse me," he continued. "I've been brung up to help myself, and not wait to be axed. Don't think a feller'd make much beggin' here; and it wouldn't be an overly safe place, for stealin'." He looked meaningly into the iron face of the merchant.

"Then get out, you impudent young hound! Up from that chair, and off with you, before I kick you out!"

"Not jist yit, guv'nor. I'm comfortable, and I guess you'd best keep so. What's the use kickin' up a flummux 'bout nothin'? Didn't think I come round here for fun, hey? I'm on bizness, I am."

"Blast your dirty picture!" and Mr. Wilkins sprung to his feet in a rage, and kicked back the chair from which he had risen. "Who sent you here to flout me, you gutter-snipe? Hey, there, George!" he called through the office window. "Send the porter in here. There's some baggage to take out."

The boy had helped himself to a tooth-pick from the table, and was leisurely picking his teeth, while he smiled in the face of the fuming merchant.

"Best keep cool, and countermand them there orders," he quietly said. "I'm only a boy, Mr. Wilkins, but I ain't none o' yer every-day boys. Jist take a squint at me and see if I look like a one-hoss galoot."

The merchant stopped in his excited walk, and fixed his stern eyes on the boy. There was something in the face of the latter that seemed to arrest his attention.

"What do you want?" he again demanded.

"I'd 'a' told you that long ago, if you hadn't gone off like gunpowder afore anybody touched a match to you. Ye're a-waitin' for a detective that you sent for."

"Ha! Who told you that?"

"I've jist stepped round from the perlice office. Guess I'll take that there job in hand, if you ain't any objections."

"You! Why, what confounded nonsense—Don't want you now." This was to the porter, who had just entered. "Keep outside. I will send for you if I want you." The man retired. "Now, boy, explain this: I sent for Harry Keen, the detective. What brings you here?"

"'Cause Harry Keen's up to his ears in work, so he sent me round. I'm his 'prentice. I'm Jolly Jim. If you know anything 'bout the New York perlice you've heerd tell of me. Calkerlate I've put through wuss jobs nor you're likely to have."

The merchant looked with new interest into the steady, intelligent face of the lad. The name had attracted his attention. It was evidently not new to him.

"Why didn't you tell me this sooner?" he demanded. "I have heard of you. But Harry Keen is a fool to send you here. He didn't think I would give my work into the hands of a boy?"

"Here's what he thinks." The lad produced a slip of paper from his pocket and handed it to the merchant.

The latter opened and read the document, while his face wore a doubtful look.

"If you are to work under his orders and directions, that is a different thing," he finally remarked. "But see here, boy. If you are going to do anything for me you will have to show a little more respect. I don't want any of your street vagabond ways, and your impudent airs."

There was a harsh imperiousness of tone in this which the boy did not relish. A defiant look came into his young eyes, and an expression of reckless disdain on his face.

"I reckon I'm a full-blooded American," he declared. "Jist as good as anybody, and a little better. I'm a crooked stick, I s'pose. If you want to straighten me, take hold. But I'm afeard you'll have a handful. I ain't been to daucin'-school, and I don't know nothin' 'bout bowin' and scrapin'. You ain't goin' to git a fox and lap-dog all in one, nohow."

Mr. Wilkins fixed his stern eyes again on his self-possessed visitor. He then walked to the office door, and spoke to a clerk outside.

"See that nobody intrudes. I have private business."

Closing the door again, he seated himself opposite the boy, who waited nonchalantly to hear from him.

"It's very true what he says here," began Mr. Wilkins, taking up the detective's letter. "There are some jobs that a boy can do better than a man."

"That's so," answered Jim. "Some chaps as is wide-awake with a man, jist soften right out when they've got a boy to do with. Dive in, now, Mr. Wilkins. What's the case?"

"Abduction," answered the merchant, while the frown returned to his brows. "My child has been stolen."

"Whew! That's better nor till-pickin', or sich little jobs. Go ahead, sir. You dunno who's in it?"

"I've a notion."

"Then why don't you go for the chap?"

"Because I cannot imagine what he has done with the child."

"Can't you jerk him up to court and put the screws on him?"

"No. It won't work. The case is a peculiar one. Force won't do. It must be worked up by cunning."

"That ain't very peccoliar. Let's hear the pertik'lars, Mr. Wilkins."

"The child is a girl, three years of age," began the merchant. "A pretty little thing. I have her picture, which I will give you. She was stolen night before last, from my country-house, on Staten Island."

"And what's the game?" asked Jim. "What does the chap want?"

"To pinch me, I fancy."

"'Cause you've pinched him, hey?"

"Yes. I blame my brother-in-law for the job. I have tried to trace him quietly, but he has been too sharp for me."

Jim looked up with a shrewd meaning in his eyes.

"You ain't let out the whole cat yit," he declared. "So far, I've only seen its whiskers. I'd like to see its tail."

The merchant hesitated for a minute and then continued:

"This is the whole of it. A year ago I separated from my wife. Since then I've kept possession of the child, which is mine by law."

"Sare of that?" asked Jim. "Only three years old. Don't the law give babies to their mothers?"

"The mother is out of her wits," was the answer. "She is in the insane asylum."

A low whistle came from Jim's lips.

"The child is mine. This man, Gilbert Bacon, has stolen it from me out of revenge. To arrest

him will not bring back the child. Force will be of no use here. Cunning must do the work. Do you think you could put yourself on the track of this man, and trace him to his hiding-places? He is no fool. The least false step will put him on his guard. Don't try it unless you are sure of yourself."

"I'm allers sure of myself," answered Jim, confidently. "I'm yer lad. Jist put me on the track, and I calkerlate to run down my fox."

"I will make it worth your while, if you recover the child." Mr. Wilkins put on an air of great feeling.

He proceeded to give more detailed particulars of the abduction, and to describe the appearance, and place of abode of Gilbert Bacon.

A few minutes more, and Jim took his departure, well up in the work he was expected to do. A look of grim intelligence was on the boy's face as he rounded into the street.

"I bet a cow I ain't to the bottom of this job," he declared. "That Wilkins is an old con. Wonder he didn't try to squeeze out some tears for his poor daurter. He's jist the biggest rascal in the job. I'll go high on that. But 'tain't none o' my bizness. I'm to fotch back the little gal, and I'm a-goin' for her heavy."

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST POINT IN THE GAME.

"Jist see here, little gal, that's too heavy a load for you. S'pose you flop it over this way, and let me carry it."

The speaker was a very ragged and dilapidated boy, with enough dirt on his face to raise potatoes. No one would have recognized, except, perhaps, by the glint of his sharp eyes, the wide-awake face of Jim, the young detective. He had evidently got himself up in disguise, for some special purpose.

He had stopped before a house of some pretensions, at which a small-sized servant girl was carrying out a bucket of water, much too heavy for her.

"Guess ye're overdoin' yerself," continued the boy. "Why, you look like a mouse carryin' a Newfoundland dog. Fork over that there bucket to a chap that's got the backbone to handle it."

He took the heavy weight from the hand of the willing girl and lifted it as if it had been a feather.

"There's muscle for you!" he declared. "What you goin' to do with this here liquid? Ain't goin' to drink it?"

"No," answered the girl; "I am going to wash the pavement. There, where we've been getting in coal."

"That's hunky," cried Jim. "I'm a perfect hoss at washin' pavements. Jist toss over that broom and flop down a few drops, and I'll show you some science."

The girl, very well satisfied with this state of affairs, smilingly tipped the edge of the bucket. In a moment Jim was using the broom with the vigor of a steam engine, mixing up coal-dust and water into an inky mess and flinging it over the pavement in a fashion that made the girl run back in dismay.

"Stop, you little rascal!" exclaimed the girl.

"Hand me the broom. Why, you'll have that stuff scattered over half the city!"

"Hold up, you young hound!" ejaculated a gentleman who had just come up, and whose face narrowly escaped a black bath. "What scapegrace is this you have got in tow?" he angrily asked the girl.

"It's a boy that's going to learn me how to scrub," she replied, springing to Jim and grasping the broom. "Give it to me. You can pour the water, if you want to, and I will show you how to sweep."

Jim willingly relinquished the broom. He had his eyes fixed on the face of the handsome, well-dressed gentleman, who was now entering the house.

"Who is that?" he asked the girl.

"That's Mr. Bacon, the gentleman I live with, and a nice gentleman too. Pour some water here now, and I'll show you."

There seemed to be other thoughts in Jim's brain. He tipped the bucket in an absent-minded way, that sent more than half its contents swirling around the girl's feet. She leaped back in alarm.

"I didn't ask you to drown me," she exclaimed. "Get out now and leave me alone. You're a perfect nuisance."

"I'll git you some more water," answered Jim, as he lifted the bucket and dashed the balance of its contents on the pavement. "No use bein' mean 'bout water when there's a whole ocean of it not fur from your back door."

He snatched up the bucket and walked off with it, while the girl deftly plied the broom. In a few minutes he returned, with another bucketful, which he dashed around in the same generous fashion as before.

In a short time the pavement was as clean as a new pin.

"Takes you and me," exclaimed Jim, looking admiringly at their work. "Nothing like plenty of water, and a pretty gal at the broom."

"Get out, you rogue!" exclaimed the pleased girl.

"Not much, till I've got my rations," answered the boy. "You don't s'pose I'm doin' all this for nothin'? Dunno how hungry I am. Ain't eat nothin' for six days, 'cept one apple core and some b'iled 'tater skins."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed the girl, with ready sympathy. "Come in. How hungry you must be! I will find you something."

"Good for you, little sweet eyes," responded Jim. "What's your name?"

"Mary!"

"Mine's Jim. 'Most anything 'll do me. A mince pie and a slice of plum puddin', and any sich cold vittals you've got layin' round. I ain't partik'lar."

"I should think not," laughed Mary, as she led the way to the kitchen. "Would you like some ice cream to wind up with?"

"It's cold vittals I want; not freezin' vittals," answered Jim, severely.

In a few minutes he found himself seated at the kitchen table, with a plentiful repast before him. He had evidently got on the right side of his hostess.

"That's clever," he exclaimed, grasping a biscuit in one hand, and a chicken's wing in the

other. "You know the ropes, Mary. Got mighty neat quarters, ain't you? Mrs. Bacon don't mess 'round none, does she?"

"No. She's ever so nice."

"How's the little brats? They come howlin' round, and mixin' things?" asked Jim, with his mouth well filled.

"There isn't any," answered the girl. "There's nobody but Mr. and Mrs. Bacon."

"No little gals, 'bout three years old, or thereaways?"

"What puts that notion into your head?" asked Mary, in surprise.

"'Cause they always has 'em," replied Jim, as he continued to do duty to his plate. "Little squallin' brats, as makes things lively. Sure there ain't none 'round here?"

"Why, no. They're all grown folks here."

"Ain't none hid away in closets, or locked up in back rooms, with padlocks on their jaws to keep 'em from squallin'? Sort o' Bluebeard bizness? Jist think a bit, if you ain't seen nothin' of that sort?"

"What makes you talk so much like a fool?" exclaimed Mary, a little ruffled, but very much mystified. "Do you suppose the folks here are kidnappers, or have you lost your own brains?"

The girl was evidently surprised by his odd questions. Jim looked into her face, and felt satisfied upon one point. The stolen child had not been brought there.

"Only makin' talk, Mary," he continued. "Don't you mind me. I'm a queer chap. Tell you what, that's nice grub. Mr. Gilbert must be awful rich."

"Guess he is," answered Mary.

"Come home at nights?" asked Jim.

"Where else do you suppose he goes?"

"Kinder looks to me like a man as wouldn't keep good hours."

"He does then. He is in every night by ten o'clock."

"Sure of that?"

"Near every night, anyhow," said Mary, casting a cautious look around her, while an expression of secrecy came upon her face. "But—you won't tell?"

"Couldn't make me tell if you'd cover me all over with snappin' turtles."

"Well, last Wednesday night"—her voice sunk to a whisper—"he was out all night. I waked up near morning, and heard him come pat, pat into the house, treading as soft as an old cat. And since then he has been out late every night. It looks very queer, when he has been always so regular before."

"Mighty queer," answered Jim, with an air as if he fancied Mr. Bacon to be concerned in some deep conspiracy. "The idear of a man of family rowlin' 'round that way. How does Mrs. Bacon take it?"

"That's the queerest part. She don't seem a bit worried. She's just that smiling as if he was out 'tending to business all night long."

"It's just the onaccountablest thing I ever heerd tell on," declared Jim, solemnly. "There's something wrong 'bout this diggin's. Jist you keep your mouth shet and yer eyes open, Mary. You'll see sights afore long."

Mary looked her determination to investigate that unfathomable mystery.

"Who have you there?" came in sharp tones from the inner kitchen.

Mary sprung up in hasty alarm.

"It's only a poor hungry boy that I'm giving a bite of vittals," she replied.

"Then send him away. I won't have you bringing strangers into the kitchen. Just remember that in future."

Mary seemed very much surprised as the face of her mistress appeared at the door, with a stern look upon it.

"I won't, ma'am, if you don't want me to. I thought you didn't mind."

"I was drefful hungry, ma'am," protested Jim, "and I only eat some cold bits."

"Very well," was the sharp answer. "Go now, and don't come back again. See that the gate is locked behind him, Mary."

The frightened girl hustled Jim away and out of the gate. She whispered, however, in a tone of mysterious doubt:

"I never knowed Mrs. Bacon to act so before. She's ever so kind. There's something wrong going on. Them late nights mean something."

"You bet," answered Jim. "Jist you keep an eye open. There's somethin' queer in the wind. Look out for the little gal with the padlock on her mouth. I'll sneak round some day, and you kin tell me all 'bout it."

Mary laughed at the boy's persistence in this notion. She locked the gate behind Jim, who walked carelessly away.

But, though his movements were lazy, his brain was busy. He was running over in his mind the points which he had pumped from Mary, and trying to come to some decision about them.

"Mr. Bacon was out all night Wednesday night. That settles one p'int," he considered. "He's the man that stole the baby. But where is she? That's the next question. It's my game to hunt up Mr. Bacon in them night trips."

Having formed this resolution, he walked on at ease in his mind. He had taken the first step in his project, and had succeeded in placing a spy in the heart of the Bacon mansion. He felt sure he could depend on the awakened curiosity of the girl to keep him posted in any mysterious movements there. The next step was to discover what it was that kept Mr. Bacon out so late at nights. To this the young detective now turned his energies.

He had already learned several points in regard to Gilbert Bacon. He was a broker, who had an office in Wall street. He was in the habit of taking his dinner at a city restaurant after office hours, and frequently had business which detained him until night ere he crossed the river to Brooklyn, in which city his residence was situated. He was in the habit of crossing at Fulton Ferry, about six o'clock in the evening.

On the afternoon of the day of the above events, at five o'clock, the young detective might have been seen at the ferry in question. Another change had come over his appearance. His face was cleaner than in the morning, his clothes not so dilapidated, and over his shoulder was flung the box of a bootblack, indicating that he had taken up a new trade.

It cannot be said that he was very active in his new profession. Now and then he blacked an offered pair of boots, but he did not trouble himself to seek for customers. On the contrary, he spent most of his time seated on the end of his box and closely scanning the faces of the passengers who kept pouring in a steady stream into the ferry-house. As six o'clock approached the throng became denser. It kept the boy busy in his effort to get a glimpse of every face. The hour came and went, and the busy crowd somewhat thinned out, and yet there was no trace of Gilbert Bacon.

It was quite possible that the young spy had missed him in the multitude. But Jim was clear grit. He was not the boy to give up while the ghost of a hope remained. Seven o'clock passed, eight o'clock came. But few passengers were now crossing. Flinging the box with a jerk of disappointment over his shoulder, he turned to leave, when at that very moment the person for whom he was in wait entered the ferry-house.

Mr. Bacon was not alone. A young gentleman accompanied him. They seemed in a hurry, and rushed to catch the boat that was on the point of starting. Jim found that he, too, had pressing business in Brooklyn, and hurried aboard the same boat. He managed to coil himself into a seat not far from that occupied by the two gentlemen.

But if he hoped to catch some useful points from their conversation he was destined to disappointment.

Reaching the Brooklyn side, they took a street-car. Jim found a seat on his box on the platform of the same car.

After half an hour's ride they left the car, at a point not far from the bay side of the city. They hurried onward now, with cautious looks to right and left, until the water-side was reached.

Jim had followed them, with all his old caution. He was a little put out, however, when he saw them enter a boat, that seemed in waiting, and row out into the bay, impelled by the strong arms of a brace of boatmen.

The boy stood nonplused, now gazing hopelessly after them, and now looking along the wharves, with the forlorn hope of discovering a stray boat.

CHAPTER III.

A CHASE BY NIGHT.

ACROSS the channel, with long strokes, went the boat which contained Gilbert Bacon and his companion. They conversed in low tones as they went, so as not to be heard by the boatmen, whose busy oars sent the boat swirling through the ruffled waters.

"It will not do for me to come over again, for some time at least," said Mr. Bacon. "Wilkins is no fool. Likely enough he has spies on my track now. So far I have given them the slip, but it will not do to tempt fortune."

"Water leaves no trail," answered his companion, looking back over the dark stretch of waves.

So far as he could see all was clear.

"I fancy I can snap my fingers at him yet," continued Mr. Bacon. "I have only to keep

quiet now for awhile, and trust to you. No one will suspect you. You can keep me posted by letters."

"And not too many of them," answered his companion. "They may take decided steps and seize your correspondence."

"That is true. You had best not write. You can run over and see me occasionally."

"The cold-blooded hound!" continued Mr. Bacon, angrily. "I would like to pinch him deeper still, Harry. The villain has locked up my sister in a madhouse, yet he knows in his heart she is as much in her senses as you and I. She must be released. By Heaven, she shall be released, if there is justice in the country!"

"There is law," answered Harry. "And he has got it on his side. He was cunning enough to torment his poor wife until she seemed out of her wits. He has locked her up by legal measures. You will find it no easy matter to break the web he has woven."

"Then I will undermine it," angrily declared Mr. Bacon. "If he plots I can counterplot. She must come out of that den of maniacs."

He fell into a moody silence, while the boat moved swiftly on.

It would have been better if they had paid more heed to the boat that now came darting around the stern of the passing steamer, tossed by the waves raised by her whirling screw. It was a light craft, rowed by a skillful oarsman, and riding the troubled waters as lightly as a feather. The oarsman looked eagerly before him, as the long range toward the dark shores of Staten Island came again into view. There was a light on the point of land directly ahead, whose gleam was occasionally broken by some moving object between.

"Took 'em up, sure as blue mud!" cried the boatman, with satisfaction. "I'll go a flip that's their boat. Knowed they couldn't fling me, no-how. They're smart, I s'pose, but Jolly Jim ain't the sort that's easy dished."

It was Jim himself, who had somehow obtained possession of a boat.

We must go back to where we left him standing in a fit of angry disappointment at the water-side, looking helplessly at the departing boat.

Several boats floated in the water beside the wharf, but they were chained fast, and there was little hope of obtaining one of them in time for his purpose.

"That's what I call swarmin' hard luck," he muttered, as he looked hopelessly across the waters.

"What's that?" asked a voice beside him. "Want to get over to the island? Hallo, Jim! is it you?"

"Calkerlate it am," exclaimed Jim, eagerly, turning and recognizing a waterman of his acquaintance. "And I've got mighty partik'ler bizness t'other side of the channel, jist now."

"Then we can put this and that together. Here's Joe Perkins's boat that I promised to send back to-night sure, and I ain't much in the humor for a row. If you've a notion to take it over to Joe's wharf I'll owe you a good turn next time."

"I'm yer hoss!" averred Jim, with a burst of

gratification. "Untie the critter quick, for I'm on the war-path, and ain't got no time to waste. You kin trust me, I guess. Don't believe many boys kin swing a pair of oars handier."

"That's so, Jim," answered the boatman, as he unlocked the chain that fastened a light boat to the wharf. "But what's your hurry?"

"Got a job on hand, that's all. Can't blow the secrets of the perfession. Good-by." He leaped into the rocking boat. "Toddle down them oars. If you want to see muscle and shape, jist keep your eyes propped, for I'm goin' to make her spin."

And spin she did. Jim was an excellent rower, having had plenty of practice during his wild life around New York Harbor, and he knew how to combine skill and strength in the handling of a pair of oars.

The fugitives were now out of sight, but he had noted the direction of their flight and followed on the same line, keeping his eyes on certain lights that served to guide his course.

It was not until he had passed the steamer that he stopped rowing to take an observation across the bay, with the result we have seen. Satisfied that the shadowy object ahead, that lay between him and the distant light, was the boat of which he was in pursuit, he lay once more to his oars, keeping two of the lights of Brooklyn in range as a guide.

He had no fear of being himself seen. There were no low lights behind him to reveal his deep-sunk boat.

The chase continued for some fifteen minutes longer. The boy was evidently gaining. His craft was like an arrow, and cut its way swiftly through the waters. Ere long, the sound of oars came back to his ears.

"Rollin' 'em up," he ejaculated, as he let his own oars fall more cautiously. "Knowed they couldn't git away. Let's take another squint."

He turned and looked across the dark surface of the channel.

The high shores of the island now loomed close in advance, their wooded elevations revealed by lights that dotted them here and there like stars. The gleam that had so far guided him lay close at the water's edge. By stooping he could catch the lines of the boat in advance, faintly outlined by this light. The figures of its occupants were also dimly visible.

Jim rowed more cautiously when he again took up his oars.

In ten minutes more he saw the boat of the fugitives touch the land close by the light. He turned his own prow somewhat to the east, not deeming it advisable to land at the same point.

Soon the sharp prow of the light craft struck a muddy beach, and ran far up the smooth slant until half out of the water.

"Whoa!" cried Jim. "Don't want to land you high and dry. Guess this will toe the mark. I'll hitch the critter to shore; but I ain't goin' to hunt up no Joe Perkins to-night, you bet! Got other fish to fry."

Laying his oars in the boat, and seizing the chain, he sprung into the yielding mud. In a moment he had gained firmer ground, and twined the chain around a sapling that grew near the water's edge. A quick knot, and the boat was fast and he free.

"So far so good. Now for t'other job."

He had landed at a dark corner, a hundred yards east of the low wharf at which the other boat now lay. It was visible from where he stood, floating at the wharf head, while its two rowers stood on the pier logs, rope in hand, as if about to moor the craft. Their two passengers had disappeared.

"Waitin' to take somebody back," declared Jim, with a quick comprehension of the fact. "Don't keer a fig for that. I'm arter them chaps as has slid. If they give me the slip now, I oughter be kicked by a mule."

As he spoke he was rapidly moving forward through the darkness. Scarce a minute had passed since the sharp cut-water of his boat struck the land, and he was already in full pursuit.

The night was a cloudy one. But the shrewd boy was not without his plans. He knew that a road led up from the wharf at which the other boat had landed, and he had no idea that the two men would stumble through dark fields when they had a straight road before them. He therefore made his way at an angle for this road, and hurried quickly along on gaining it, eager to once more get his sharp eyes on the fugitives.

Little did they fancy that such a keen-eyed hound was on their track.

In less than five minutes after his landing the young detective caught a glimpse of two dark figures before him, who were following the well-trodden path by the side of the sloping road. They were walking easily onward, engaged in conversation, and without a thought that there was any special need for caution. The boy chuckled to himself as some of their words came back to his ears.

"Lawsee, ain't they goin' it blind," he remarked, with a wink to the night. "Think it's all smooth sailin', and that nobody'll see 'em, 'cause they choose to shet their eyes. If they only knowed that Jolly Jim was on their track, wouldn't there be a howlin' old time!"

The road sloped gradually upward from the water's edge. Here and there a house rose beside it. These were low, humble residences, but more stylish ones appeared after a mile had been traversed. The two men now left the road they had been pursuing, and entered a wider one that ran off eastward. A mile further in this direction, and they gained a considerable elevation, while several fine mansions appeared, dark among their embowering trees, the most of them standing well back from the road.

Near one of these the two men suddenly left the road, and moved through an open field, along the high fence that encompassed the grounds of the mansion.

"Calkerlate I'm gettin' 'em treed," declared Jim, with delight. "Goin' home by the back door, I reckon."

He followed in their track, keeping well behind. Reaching the lower corner of the fence they turned, and disappeared behind it. The boy cautiously pursued, fearful of coming upon them too quickly.

When he reached the corner and peered around it there was no one in sight. He im-

puted this to the darkness, however, and moved forward along the fence. It was in vain; the fugitives had vanished.

"I knowed it," he declared, confidently. "They've clumb the fence, and dug in by the back door. I'll give my head if I ain't treed that there precious baby, and I'm goin' over that fence if I have to hire a balloon."

For the active boy no balloon was necessary. The fence was about eight feet high, but was made of open palings, and was easily climbed. He moved stealthily through the bush-planted grounds toward the dark mass of the mansion.

But, quietly as he glided onward, there were ears at hand too alert to be easily deceived. A growl, followed by a loud bark, broke upon the nightly silence. Then came the rush of a heavy body through the bushes.

"Dogs! and loose ones at that!" declared Jim. "If I don't want to be chawed up alive I've got to run like snakes."

He dashed for the house. It was dark in the rear, but lights were visible in front. An open window made its appearance near the point which he had reached, and without an instant's hesitation the boy sprung through it. He had no fancy of being at the tender mercy of a savage dog.

He found himself in a dark room. Outside the dog was fiercely baying. Steps sounded in the front of the house. The gleam of a light was visible. Evidently the people had been alarmed by the dog, and were seeking the cause of its furious barking.

"Deuce take that hound!" cried Jim, looking around him. "The dog outside and the folks inside, and not a rat-hole to hide in. If I ain't nipped in a trap then there's no snakes."

He looked at the window. There was the dog. He turned to the room door. There came the light. Another door appeared in a corner. This he hastily opened, only to find that it led into a shallow closet. He was decidedly in for it.

In a minute more the steps had reached the door of the room, and the light flashed into the boy's eyes.

"Who's there?" came a harsh voice. "Don't move. I am armed. I'll shoot you if you make any resistance."

"Ain't no use wastin' powder and shot, gunner," declared Jim. "I dunno as I'm kickin' up any fandangoes."

The light entered the room, borne by a stout, stern-faced man, whose countenance Jim recognized at a glance, while a cry of astonishment escaped his lips.

"Mr. Wilkins! Oh, Jeminy!" he exclaimed. "My eyes, if this ain't a gay dig!"

CHAPTER IV.

CAUGHT IN A TICKLISH SITUATION.

A WEEK has passed since the date of our last chapter, but the young detective is yet all at sea in his enterprise. His confident hope that he was on the track of the stolen child proved a bitter disappointment. The search made by Mr. Wilkins for the robbers, whom he supposed to be secreted in his grounds, proved fruitless. There was no one there. He turned angrily

on the boy, and accused him of tricking him, and of entering his house with some criminal design.

But Jolly Jim was not the boy to submit quietly to such a charge as this, and in language more pointed than polite he gave the angry merchant a piece of his mind. He ended by relating his adventure, and declaring that the child must be secreted somewhere near there. Gilbert Bacon and his companion could not have climbed the fence, as he had supposed, but must have gone on. The whole neighborhood must be watched.

This was the task that Jim gave himself during the succeeding week. He kept a sharp eye on every house in the direction in which the two men had gone, for a mile or two in advance. He made diligent inquiry also as to the inmates of these houses. But nothing suspicious appeared, and after a week's watch Jim gave it up in despair. He was on the lookout for Mr. Bacon's companion on the night of the pursuit. There would probably be communication between the two, and it might be best to keep an eye on the main kidnapper.

With this object in view the young spy crossed again to New York, and put himself on the watch of Mr. Bacon's office. He became a bootblack again, with a stand on Wall street, within easy eyesight of the office in question. Not a soul went in or out of that door without passing under Jim's sharp eyes.

Yet two days passed ere there was any reward to his untiring vigilance. On the afternoon of the third, as he was polishing the foot gear of a stout money-king, he gave a start that almost threw that individual off his balance.

"Hillo, there!" cried the latter, angrily. "What ails you, jackanapes?"

"Some chap stuck a pin in me," declared Jim. "That's him now, runnin' away there. Jist wait till I'm done polishin' you and see if I don't polish that rooster."

This story was a sheer piece of invention. The fact was that the boy had at that instant caught sight of the face for which he had watched patiently for three days. The young man whom he wanted had at that moment entered Mr. Bacon's office.

Jolly Jim looked for no more customers. He did not even wait until the young gentleman should come out again from the office. Shouldering his box, he walked away with a satisfied whistle. It seemed as if he was abandoning the trail which he had discovered; but the shrewd boy knew very well what he was about.

"If a chap wants to find a settin' hen," he declared, "he'd be a fool to hunt her through the woods. All he's got to do is to post hisself 'longside the nest, and she's sure to come back. I've got my hen off her eggs, and I'm goin' to watch the eggs instead of the chicken. You can't buy this hoss for a fool nohow."

Getting rid of his box, and changing his attire for a dress more suitable to his present purpose, Jim took the boat for Staten Island. It was approaching night when he reached there. He made the best of his way to the road in the vicinity of Mr. Wilkins's house, near the spot at which he had lost the fugitives on the former occasion. Here he stationed himself on a con-

venient fence rail, and whistled away, as best he could, the growing chill of the air.

"He's bound to pass here on his way back," declared the patient spy, "and I'm goin' to wait for him if it takes me till to-morrow night."

The road was but little frequented. Occasionally a carriage passed, or a pedestrian trudged along its wayside path, but several hours slid by without a trace of the party waited for. The boy was half chilled, and his whistle became useless to warm him. He got down from his perch, and ran briskly up and down the road to restore circulation.

"It was nine o'clock t'other night afore they come along," he declared. "Guess I'll guv him till ten to-night, if I don't freeze into a mummy afore that time."

He stopped his dance and withdrew into his lurking place, as he caught sight of a figure advancing up the road. As the latter came nearer, and became revealed in the dim twilight, Jim's heart gave a bound of satisfaction. His scheme had not been in vain. It was the man for whom he was in wait.

The coming traveler passed, and went on up the road, without noting that he was watched from the fence, or that a light form put itself on his track, at some distance behind. He followed the road past Mr. Wilkins's house, not taking to the fields as before.

"Lucky I didn't hide back there, or I'd got sold," considered Jim.

The young man continued to follow the road for some distance. He then turned from it and entered a narrow lane, which here led off in an easterly direction. Ere proceeding, he took a long and cautious survey of the road he had followed. There was no one in sight except a diminutive figure which came trudging slowly along. The traveler waited until this figure came up. It proved to be a boy, who was whistling vigorously as he walked onward, and who passed by without the least sign of noticing the figure in the lane. The latter followed the lad with his eyes for a few seconds, and then gazed again down the road. No one was now visible, and he gave a sigh of satisfaction.

"The secret is safe yet," he declared. "I do not believe I am suspected, and I am certainly not followed."

He turned down the lane without looking again after the boy. Had he done so he would have found that the latter had disappeared. At that moment, in fact, Jim—for it was he—was climbing a fence into an adjoining field, and chuckling to himself over his smartness.

"Flung salt into his eyes that time," he declared. "I've been rootin' 'round this country so much that I know it like a book. It'll be queer if I don't head him off."

The lane ran along one side of the field in which he was, and he crossed at an angle toward it. Reaching its boundary fence, he looked cautiously for the traveler. There he was, not fifty paces in advance.

Jim now kept to the fields, jumping the fences which he met, but not entering the lane until forced to do so by an occasional house. Thus he continued for half a mile, keeping well out of sight.

Twilight had now deepened into night, and

though he had drawn up closer, the figure of the person in advance was but dimly visible. The latter now suddenly paused, Jim pausing also. This stop had taken place in front of a small wayside house, apparently the residence of some humbler inhabitant of the district. After another cautious survey of the road he turned and knocked in a peculiar manner at the house-door. The signal came clearly to the ears of the spy. After a momentary interval the door opened, and the young man disappeared within.

Jim danced with delight as he jumped from the fence into the road.

"If I ain't a hoss, then there ain't no hosses," he declared, "and everybody that ain't a mule must be a jackass. That's old Mother Shipton's house. She's got money, folks say, as was left her by her husband, who was a sailor, and she lives there alone 'cept her nevey, who's lately come home from abroad. That's a pretty yarn, but I guess the old woman's ready for snacks. She don't have no visitors, I guess not. Nor she don't want none while that little gal's hid there."

He advanced until he came in front of the house, where he took a long look at its appearance. It was a cottage-built mansion, of two stories and an attic in height, rather a dilapidated structure, and surrounded by evidences of very careless housekeeping. The windows were closed, and all was in darkness, except that a light shone through the chinks of one shutter.

This soon disappeared, but quickly made its reappearance in a rear room on the second floor. Here it remained stationary for a time, while the shadow of a man's figure was occasionally thrown upon the window. Then the light again disappeared, and soon shone once more from a window in the front part of the house.

The boy spy had cautiously watched all these movements, and drawn his own conclusions from them. He came to the opinion that the child was sleeping in that rear room, and that the young man had been taking a survey of it ere seeking his own apartment in the front part of the house.

Jim cogitated as to what was next to be done.

Looking around him for some suggestion, his eyes fell upon a ladder that lay against a shed behind the house. It seemed long enough to reach the upper window. This was enough for Jim's quick disposition. In a moment he had seized the ladder and was carrying it to the desired point, where he cautiously reared it and noiselessly planted it against the side of the house. It was just long enough for his purpose.

One heedful look around, and he began to mount the ladder, taking great care to make no noise. In a minute he had reached the upper rounds. The window sash was now under his hands. All was dark within, except that a faint light struggled through the crack of the door leading to the front room. The sash yielded readily to the boy's hands, and noiselessly went up. In a minute more, with a bold movement, he had his foot over the window-sill and on the floor of the room within.

Jim paused for an instant, listening to every sound. There was no indication that he had given the alarm. He drew his other foot over the sill and stood within the room. There was light enough for him to make out his surroundings.

To the left was a bedstead and bed. Beside it was a chest of drawers, and a few chairs completed the furniture of the room. But his attention was drawn to the bed, for there lay on the pillow a diminutive head, a pretty child's face surrounded by a wealth of flaxen hair.

Jim looked for a moment upon the scene with high enjoyment. To his taste for beauty was mingled a deep satisfaction in the feeling that his enterprise was successful. It was the face of the portrait which Mr. Wilkins had given him.

There was not a minute to lose. The child was fast asleep, and might possibly be removed without waking.

Flinging back the bedclothes, the daring boy seized a blanket, and carefully wrapped it around the form of the sleeping child. He then lifted her cautiously from the bed and inclosed her form with his left arm, leaving his right free for duty.

He crossed to the window with his light burden, and put one foot over the sill, to the top round of the ladder outside.

At this instant the touch of the chill night air awoke the child. A look of fright came into her young face as she struggled in the inclosing arm, while a loud scream broke from her lips, enough almost to wake the dead.

"Hillo! what's wrong in there?" came a cry from the front room.

Footsteps sounded on the floor as another scream rent the air.

Jim was in a delicate situation, only half out of the room, and with a very uneasy burden in his struggling prize. He began to fear that he had caught a white elephant.

CHAPTER V.

JIM HAS HIS HANDS FULL.

It was decidedly a critical situation in which our young detective found himself, and one in which he did not feel a bit inclined to be jolly. It was a time for action, not for thought. Every second told now, and the question of success or failure was the question of a minute well employed.

With no further care about noise, he slipped his other foot over the sill, and in an instant stood on the ladder outside. Hugging the screaming child close to his side, and using only his right hand, the young detective ran down the ladder like a cat, and was on the ground by the time the person above had gained the room.

The flash of a lamp around the apartment, a glance at the empty and disturbed bed, and the pursuer sprang to the window.

"Hold, there, you kidnapping villain!" he cried, angrily. "Don't stir, or it will be worse for you." He set a foot on the ladder.

"Git off that ladder, or it'll be the wuss for you," yelled Jim, in return.

He kicked the foot of the ladder as he spoke. It tottered for a moment, and then slid down

along the side of the house, leaving the pursuer seated astride the window-sill.

"Stop, or by Heaven I'll make an end of you!" exclaimed the latter. "I am armed. If you move a step I'll stop you with a pistol-bullet."

"Jist as easy as you could stop a locomotive with a snow-ball," was the boy's gibing answer. "If you drop any bullets 'round here this baby's goin' to catch 'em, mind that. This is Paul Wilkins's little gal, an' that's where I'm goin' to take it. If you want it back, you'd best come ax him."

Jim was not idle while thus speaking, but was darting away as fast as the uneasy burden he carried would permit. The child was thoroughly frightened, and screamed with all the force of her young lungs as the boy ran onward, clasping her firmly to his side.

With a furious exclamation the man climbed back into the room and ran for the stairs. At the same time the front door of the house opened and a woman ran out. The fugitive was between two fires. He darted away toward the rear of the house, where he burst through a partly-open gate and into a broad field that lay beyond.

It was deep darkness ahead of him, and he had not the faintest idea where he was going. He knew from the sounds in the rear that his pursuers were already in full chase, and loud cries for him to stop broke on the still night air.

"Much I'll stop!" cried Jim, in disdain. "I wouldn't keer a cent a cart-load for ye, if it weren't for this ridiculous squealin' brat. Mought as well have a 'lectric light on my coat-tail as sich a critter as this to put the wolves on my track. Hold yer whist, you squealin' little monkey, 'fore I choke ye!"

But little monkey had no thought of doing anything of the kind. She squalled more obstreperously than ever. She squirmed like an eel in the boy's arms. She got her hands loose, and clawed his face until he could hardly endure it.

And at that same time his pursuers, guided by the sound, and free from incumbrance, were rapidly gaining upon him.

Had not the boy been true grit he would have let his burden fall, and made the best of his way out of the scrape—but that was not Jim's way. Neck or nothing was his motto, and he would have despised himself to give up while there was a ghost of a chance to succeed.

"That way, Mother Shipton; I'll take this side. We've got the rascal now, sure!"

"'Tain't quite so sure," growled Jim, as he struggled on desperately over the ridges of a plowed field. "I jist see how it is—I've got to cork up your noise-box, you young chimpanzee."

He pressed his free hand tightly on the child's mouth, bringing her screaming solo to a sudden termination.

At the same moment he stumbled over a stone, and fell headlong into a furrow of the plowed field.

He had managed to save the child from injury in the fall. A shrewd idea came into his brain. Instead of springing to his feet again he lay

still, continuing to press his hand roughly on the child's mouth.

"It is too dark for 'em to see me," he thought. "If I kin only keep this little squeal-bag from bu'stin' out for two minutes, it mought be all hunky yit. Let 'em shoot ahead, and I'll double on 'em like a fox on a hound."

His plan was a good one. His pursuers were too far behind to see him in the dense darkness, and they were not aware of his fall. Guiding each other by their voices as they ran, in a minute more they passed him, quite visible to the watchful boy, but failing to observe him in the shadowy furrows.

Troubled by the cessation of the child's cries, they hurried blindly forward, plunging into the darkness.

There was no time to lose. In a moment Jim was on his feet again, and was cautiously retracing his steps toward the house. The light that shone from its second-floor window served to guide him onward.

It was easier traveling after he got out of the plowed ground, and he made his way more rapidly, still checking the voice of the frightened child, though an occasional muffled sound broke through his choking fingers.

Quickly darting around the side of the house he gained the lane in front, and ran quickly along it, not caring in what direction, so he could put distance between himself and danger.

For five minutes he continued this flight, and then climbed the roadside fence, and crouched in the adjoining field. Listening intently he failed to hear any sound of pursuit. For five minutes more he waited, but all remained still. His pursuers had either given up the chase, or had taken the wrong direction.

"Dished 'em, sure as shootin'," cried the boy, gleefully. "Takes Jolly Jim to countermarch on sich galoots as them. Now, what's next in the wind? 'Spect I've got to look arter this chimpanzee that she don't freeze into a mummy."

He removed his hand from the child's mouth. It was followed by a lusty scream that had the pent-up energy of ten minutes' enforced silence.

"Squeal away, young 'un," said Jim, philosophically. "You dunno what's fur yer own good, that's sart'in. But I've got to wrap you up decently if you squall yer lungs out."

The blanket which enveloped the child was, in fact, badly disarranged, and she was chilled through with the cold of the night air. The boy neatly doubled it, and wrapped the child, who had nothing on but a thin night-dress, closely in its folds.

"There, little sweetmeat," he said, soothingly. "Why, ye're jist as snug as a bug in a rug. What's the use o' goin' on as if I was stickin' pins in you? Keep quiet now, won't you, you poor little lump."

Climbing the fence again into the lane, he walked slowly forward, hugging his prize closely to his breast.

Jim knew the lay of the land around him pretty thoroughly. The lane he was in opened into the high-road at no great distance ahead. He was, in fact, retracing the route by which he

had come, and knew that it would not take him long to reach Mr. Wilkins's house, at which he intended to deliver his prize.

But the boy was too wide awake to the chances to be quite at ease in his mind. The cessation of pursuit troubled him. Was it likely that these abductors had given up the chase without another effort? And if not, why had they not followed the lane in both directions?

There was some mystery here to be solved, and Jim's quick wit soon arrived at a solution. His own resolution was taken as quickly. He did not intend to be beaten in his enterprise, and his new purpose was indicated by his again climbing the roadside fence, and making his way through the adjoining field. His object in this will appear in the soliloquy which passed through his mind.

"I was green enough to sing out that I was goin' to hand over this baby to old Wilkins. They'd be fools if they didn't take the cue. That's where they are now, for a wager. They're ambushed round Wilkins's house, and they'll gobble me up and snatch the little gal if I go near them diggin's. Won't do, nohow. I've got to make a long tack, and fetch up t'other side."

The boy's wit had hit on the exact fact. His pursuers were really ambushed at a favorable spot near the house in question, ready to pounce upon him if he should come near.

Making a long detour through the fields, he reached the road again a considerable distance in advance. The child was now nestled quietly in his arms, and seemed to be sleeping. He moved quickly onward, aided by the faint light.

"There's only one thing for it," he said to himself. "Won't do to try Wilkins's, and I ain't got no other hidin'-place here. Guess I'll have to cross the water, and take my bird home. I kin borrow Joe Perkins's boat without askin', and I know where to git the oars. Joe won't mind if I fetch it back safe."

The boy was in earnest. All was deserted at the point where lay the desired boat, and in a few minutes he had quietly possessed himself of the hidden oars, untied the boat, and pushed out upon the water. The sleeping child was laid snugly between his feet, in the bottom of the crank boat.

"Got to hold myself level," he remarked, as his oars broke the water. "If I upset this boat now it won't be a comfortable job."

Fortunately, the boat did not upset. About midnight that night, Jim made his appearance at the humble domicile where he lived alone with his mother. The old lady was awake when he entered.

"For all that's good, wherever have you been?" she demanded.

"Important bizness," answered Jim.

"And what's that you've got with you? My, if it ain't a baby!"

"It's a pretty one, anyhow," returned Jim. "And it's to be took as much care of as if it was all made of gold. Jist look at them eyes, mammy!"

The child was awake and looking around with a bewildered stare.

"It's a sweet little gal," said the mother, taking it from him. "But wherever, Jim—"

"Now drop all that to-night," answered the boy, decisively. "I'm sleepy as a log. Tell you all about it in the mornin'."

CHAPTER VI.

JIM THROWS UP HIS CONTRACT.

MARY, the small-sized maid-servant of Mr. Gilbert Bacon, stood on the inside of the open iron-work gate, looking out, while Jolly Jim stood on the outside, looking in. He had been palavering the soft-hearted girl to his heart's content, but on one point she was not to be moved.

"Can't you open the gate and let a chap in, Molly? The idea of keepin' a good-lookin' feller shiverin' out here in the cold, when you've got a toastin' hot fire inside."

"I hope you won't be mad," answered Mary, "but Mrs. Bacon's orders is very precise. I ain't to have no company in the kitchen."

"It's jist as I said," returned Jim. "There's a big screw loose. Anythin' turned up since the mornin' I washed the pavement for you?"

"You washed the pavement," retorted Mary, contemptuously. "Nicely you did! But, Jim," her voice sunk to a cautious tone, "there was a reg'lar time late last night. The door-bell rung like wild, somewhere about two or three o'clock. Mr. Bacon hisself went down and let in a man, and there was some very loud talk. Kind of scolding. I tried to hear, but I could only make out something about a child. They went away together, long before morning, and I haven't seen signs of them since. But Mrs. Bacon is as cross as wasps this morning I know from that that something's wrong."

"You bet there is," answered Jim. "There's jist the gayest conflux as was ever kicked up 'bout these diggin's. See here, Mary, can't you give a chap a slice of mince pie, or an apple dumplin' with 'lasses on it? Jist fork over, and I'll tell you all 'bout it."

"I daresn't, Jim. You might tell me anyhow," said Mary, coaxingly.

"Not a word," declared the boy.

"Wait a bit," exclaimed Mary, hesitatingly. "I'll fetch you a bite out here."

Mary disappeared, while the reckless boy remained cooling his heels in a dance upon the pavement. She returned after several minutes' absence.

"That is all I could get," she explained. "A sandwich, and a slice of gingerbread. But it is good."

"It's prime," answered Jim, immediately sampling his lunch. "You're a lump of sweetmeats, Mary."

"Shut up, you little fool," laughed Mary. "Now tell me all about what's the trouble with Mr. Bacon."

"Don't like to," said Jim, mysteriously, "but I s'pose I've got to s' long as I promised. Fact is, Mary— You won't tell?"

"Not a word," she solemnly declared.

"Then, Mary, he is a— You wouldn't b'lieve it, but it's gospel."

"What's gospel?" asked the girl, eagerly.

"He's—a—Mormon."

"A what?" Mary fell back with uplifted hands.

"A reg'lar Brigham Young. Got another wife hid somewhere else. That's what's about the baby. Don't you let out to Mrs. Bacon, or there'll be war in the camp. Tell you what, Molly, this is a hunky sandwich."

"Another wife!" cried Mary, lifting her apron to her face. "And a baby! Oh! the wretch! The owdacious pirate!"

"Good-by, sweetheart. Mind you now, don't you whisper it to a soul."

Jim strolled away, gnawing at his sandwich, and leaving the girl a picture of indignant consternation.

"But there'll be fun in that beehive afore long," he muttered, easily, to himself. "Lawsee, wouldn't I give somethin' to be behind the key-hole when Mary let's my cat outer the bag. You bet there'll be hair flyin'. Guess I'd best keep away from them diggin's."

In another part of the city of New York another scene was taking place. In a neatly-furnished room, fitted up as an office, sat two men in busy conversation. One of these was Paul Wilkins, the merchant. The other was a tall, well-built, keen-faced personage, with a pair of eyes that seemed to bore through one like gimlets. It was Harry Keen, the detective, Jim's tutor in the art of rogue-catching.

"Why did you send me that fool of a boy?" demanded Mr. Wilkins, angrily. "Here's two weeks of time wasted, and nothing done, just because you prefer to trust your work to a boy."

"Sure there's nothing done?" asked the detective, easily. "Jim is not an every-day boy. He told me the thing was working. I had too much else in hand to take hold of it myself."

"I tell you what's done," exclaimed the merchant. "I found your sharp apprentice in my house, near midnight, with a cock-and-bull story about tracking the child-robbers there. I knew it was a lie, but I searched the grounds without finding a shadow. I believe now the young reprobate was there for the purpose of burglary, and that this story was hatched up to get him out of my clutches. I felt it in my boots that the little thief was making a fool of me all the time."

"You did, hey? Then why didn't you snatch him bald-headed, while you had the chance?"

It was a boyish voice that spoke these words. The two men hastily turned. There, resting his shoulder against the door-jamb, stood Jolly Jim, his eyes fixed with a stern expression on his accuser.

"Hello, Jim! Is that you?" exclaimed Mr. Keen. "You heard what this gentleman said?"

"Calkerlate so," answered Jim, dryly. "I'm gittin' kinder used to lyin' and backbitin'."

"I want nothing further to do with you," cried the angry gentleman, "and I am half inclined to proceed against you now as a burglar."

"Go ahead, old hoss," answered Jim, with exasperating insolence. "I s'pose you let up on me in the baby matter. Discharge me from that job, bey?"

"Yes. I want nothing further to do with you."

"All right. I'm agreeable. Here's the baby's photygraph. I'd hand you over the papers in the bizness, only there ain't none."

Harry Keen had his eyes fixed sharply on his *protege*.

"See here, Jim," he cried. "You haven't worked two weeks for nothing. Do you know anything about the child?"

"Several things," answered Jim, dryly.

"What do you know?"

"Mr. Wilkins is my boss in this job," answered Jim. "He's discharged me without axin' fur partik'lers. Guess I'll let him take it up where I did, and hoe his own row."

"I want nothing to do with you," exclaimed the angry merchant. "I want you to take this abduction case in hand, Mr. Keen."

"Excuse me," answered the detective, politely but coldly. "I should like to accommodate you, but I have too many irons in the fire just now. I did the best I could in giving the matter over to the boy."

"You might as well have given it to a goose, or a hog," was the angry reply. "So you refuse to take it?"

"I have only one head and two hands, and they are fully employed. I should advise you to seek some other detective."

"Very well, sir. But you have managed to waste two weeks of precious time for me." The merchant angrily took his hat.

Mr. Keen politely saw him out of the door. He then turned to Jim, with an odd look on his face. The boy was stretched in an easy-chair, as if quite satisfied with himself and the world.

"You rogue," he said. "There's something behind all this. You have not been idle. What do you know about the missing child?"

"A good deal more nor I'll tell that stuck-up old fool," declared Jim. "He kin find ther baby like I did."

"You found her then?"

"You bet I did."

"Where is she?"

"Where he'll not pick her up easy."

"Where is she, I say?"

"My mammy's got her," answered the boy, with a reckless leer. "I jist changed base for him a little. Hope you didn't s'pose I was goin' it blind."

Harry Keen whistled in surprise.

"You're a sharp little coon," he declared. "But you'd best hand her over."

"Nary time. I ain't no baby, to be tongue-whipped for nothin'. He's discharged me, without askin' for real-estate or personal property, so I guess I'll give him the fun of the hunt."

"You may get into trouble, Jim."

"Reckon not. Guess I kin countermarch on him. Jist tell you this, Mr. Keen, he's got no bizness with that little gal. He's an old rascal, as has druv his wife crazy, and wants to pinch the innocent little sweet, for that's just what the baby is. She's a regular sugar-plum. I ain't in fun, Mr. Keen. I'm goin' to git even with Mr. Paul Wilkins. Don't 'low nobody to call me a thief."

Mr. Keen surveyed the nonchalant boy closely for a minute. He then turned to his desk,

"You're a young one, Jim, but you're a coon. Here. Take these papers and look this matter up. It was just banded in, and I have no time to attend to it."

He banded the boy a roll of papers.

"Make haste now and report to me what you learn."

"Where is it?" asked Jim.

"Up the river. You'll find all the particulars in that outside paper. Make haste."

"That's my persimmon," answered the ready lad. "The grass has got to be mighty spry if it wants to grow under my feet."

As he laid his hand on the door of the office it opened and a gentleman entered. Jim recognized him at a glance. It was Gilbert Bacon.

"What's he arter?" he asked himself. "I'd guv a cow to know. But bizness afore pleasure."

He walked away, leaving the new client closeted with Harry Keen.

An hour afterward Jim entered his humble home, about which his mother was bustling like an active housewife.

"I'm off, mammy," he cried, gleefully. "Got a up-river job. Put me up a bit of lunch. Can't tell when I'll be back."

"Why, forever! Where can the boy be going? Now just tell me, Jim."

"Private bizness, mammy. Detective bizness, you know. It'd be wuss than p'izen to whisper a word of it. It fetches in the shiners. That's all you need keer for. Where's the little 'un? I must guv her a buss afore I set out. How's she behavin'?"

"Like a little angel, as she is. She had a good cry this morning, but I suppose angel babies have their cries. Wouldn't be natural otherwise. Just go ahead and tell me all about her."

"Ain't got time now," cried the boy. "Put me up some bread and butter, while I give her a buss and a toss. Got to catch the steamboat."

He burst noisily into the adjoining room. There on the floor sat his little prize, playing with a picture-book which had been given her.

The child was really a little beauty, with clear blue eyes, and flaxen hair, and a skin as soft as alabaster. She made no demur when Jim caught her up and tossed her in the air, and pressed her soft cheek against his bronzed and freckled face. She laughed, indeed, as if she enjoyed being played with.

"You sweet little lump of 'lasses candy," cried the boy. "Why, I'd sooner bring you up myself than hand you over to that old Wilkins. You wouldn't git as many fine clothes maybe, but you'd git more love. Here's a buss for you to remember me by."

He pressed his lips against the child's soft cheek, set her down on the floor, and burst again into the outer room.

"Where's that lunch, mammy? Time's up. I must be gone."

In a moment more he was out in the street, and off on his enterprise.

CHAPTER VII.

A STRONG HAND AT POKER.

THE steamer on which Jolly Jim was a passenger made its way rapidly up the broad waters of the North River.

The boy had taken a seat on the upper deck, with his feet on the rail, and a look of as easy independence on his face as if he owned the craft which he honored with his presence, and had strong intentions of buying several others.

In his hand was his paper of instructions, over which he at times carefully ran his eye, and then dropped it with an air of deep cogitation.

"It's a mighty neat way of makin' money," he said to himself. "You've only got to make a little mistake, and write somebody else's name 'stead of your own. Then you've got to git absent-minded, and poke it in at bank, with a check writ above. Why it's ten times easier than stealin', and pays better. This chap toddled off with a cool thousand, and he hadn't no other expense nor a pen full of ink. I dunno a bizness where the returns is bigger for the capital invested."

He continued to cogitate, only vaguely observing the scene that lay outstretched before him.

"There's only one trouble; sometimes them chaps gits struck by lightnin', and then it don't pay so well. Shouldn't wonder if this un'd git struck afore he's much older. He dunno that Jolly Jim's on his track. It's fun, I s'pose, playin' tag on the railroad, but it's best to keep an eye skinned for the locomotive. I'm a-goin' to descend on this here lively customer; you see."

Folding his paper, he replaced it in his pocket. The steamer stopped at a small town, some twenty miles up the river, and the boy went ashore with the landing passengers. He did not stay in the town, however, but took a stage that ran back to some country villages. At one of these he left the vehicle.

"This is the place," he remarked, looking knowingly around him. "Our gentleman forger's been tracked to this here concern. I'm to do the rest of the job and report. All right, if it's in the wood."

Night was approaching as the young traveler entered the low-roofed country inn that stood in the midst of the clump of houses forming the village. It was too early yet for the villagers to assemble for their nightly chat, and only a couple of persons were present.

The landlord approached Jim, looking at him curiously, with a slight sniff as he noticed the boy's well-worn attire.

"Well, my good fellow, what can I do for you?" he asked, superciliously.

Jim looked up at the man, who was scanning him with an insolent stare. In an instant the boy had taken his cue.

"You'd best see to my boss," he easily answered. "Have him rubbed down well, and feed him a couple o' bushel of oats. Then you kin rig out yer best room for me, and git me up a swell supper. Nothin' mean, mind you. Don't try none of yer country tricks on me, or I'll kick wuss nor an army mule."

"But," stammered the landlord, a little taken aback, "but, my—my dear sir."

"Ain't nobody's dear sir," exclaimed Jim, with a haughty air. "Jist look arter that boss, and don't try blarneyin' me. I calkerlate to pay my way in this circus, and I ain't goin' to be put off with no side-shows."

The landlord, overcome by the manner of his guest, hurried from the room, leaving Jim master of the situation.

One of the guests, who had been listening to this conversation, laughed, and addressed the boy.

"By Jove, you took the starch out of him, young fellow. Take a seat here, and we'll have up another mug of ale. You're young, but you're spry."

The speaker was a good-looking young countryman. His companion, whose face was hidden from Jim until he took a seat at the table, was a short, thin faced man, with something of a downcast look. His fingers were long and thin, and seemed very expert at handling the cards which the two had been playing. He looked rather sourly at Jim, as if he did not wish an addition to the company.

At this moment the landlord hastily returned. "What's this? What's this?" he sharply cried. "There's no horse there, and hasn't been. The ostler says you came on foot. See here, young 'un, I ain't the man to play jokes of that kind on."

"Ain't no hoss there?" exclaimed Jim, with an air of surprise. "Guess I must ha' dropped him somewhere down the road, then, and never missed him. Jist tell your ostler to snatch on to the critter if he sees him trottin' past. And git me up a square meal quick. I'm as hungry as a hedgehog."

"You'd best git, now," cried the irate landlord. "I don't keep a hotel to feed road tramps."

"See here," cried Jim, springing up, and drawing from his pocket a handful of money, which he rattled under the landlord's nose. "I kalkerlate to pay my way. If you say much more I'll smother you in money. Now skeet, and rig me up some provender. And enough for these gentlemen, too, if they'll j'ine me."

"You bet we will!" cried the younger, while his older comrade frowned, as if not quite satisfied with the arrangement.

The sight of the boy's money had quite changed the landlord's expression of countenance. Muttering some apology, he hurried from the room, while Jim turned to his new acquaintances, with a laugh of triumph.

"That allers fetches 'em," he said. "You've only got to let them smell the dingbats."

Jim took a seat and looked on at the game which the two men were playing. The older of the two frowned at this, as if he did not care to be watched, but frowns were wasted on the independent boy, who did not hesitate to express his opinion in very free language.

"Seems to me this game don't agree with your constitution," he remarked to the young countryman, who was steadily losing. "Why, you'd be warped outer a farm and a pair of oxen in less time than a crow could go through a cornfield."

"Got deuced bad luck," growled the countryman.

"It's all chance," answered the other player. "Come, it's your deal."

The boy shifted his seat, so that he could overlook the cards of the last speaker. The latter hid his hand from sight.

"Excuse me, young chap," he grumbled. "I've got a superstition about letting anybody see my hand but myself. Just suppose you change your seat."

"Dunno why," retorted Jim. "Got a right to pick out my square inches in this here bar-room, 's long as I pay my way. If you're playin' fair, I guess my eyes won't change the papers."

"Who says I'm not playing fair?" cried the other, in a blustering tone.

"Hang me if I believe you are!" cried the countryman, flinging down his cards and rising from his seat. "Don't tell me that it's all luck. I'll be shot if I'll turn another card!"

"I'll smash the head of the man that says I cheat!" exclaimed the gambler, in a furious tone. "As for you, you infernal young snip, if you come here to break our game I'll not take long to toss you out of the window."

"Don't want to break up nobody's game," answered Jim, very meekly. "If you want to rig up a match, count me in, for a go at draw-poker. Guess I've got cash enough to back my cards."

The gambler looked up with considerable surprise at this proposition, and fixed a pair of keen eyes on the nonchalant youth as if seeking to measure his caliber.

"I'm one in that," cried the countryman. "I've been losing like fun at eucher, and I want to get even."

"I'm your man," said the gambler. "Just choose your game, and count me in." He looked at Jim as a hawk might look at an unfledged chicken, upon which it has designs.

At this moment the landlord returned.

"You will have to wait a little," he said to Jim. "Supper will be ready in half an hour."

"That's square talk," answered the boy. "Kalkerlate to make the dough to pay for it by that time. Me and these gentlemen are goin' in for a bout at poker, and I allers play to win."

A laugh followed these bragging words. The cards were dealt, and the game began.

The gambler smiled grimly as he listened to the bragging youth. He dealt the cards with his skillful touch. Jim looked at his hand. It held four tens. The countryman declined to bet.

"I'll go a quarter on that pool," declared Jim.

"See you, and lift it to a dollar," answered the gambler.

"That's a dead bluff!" exclaimed the boy, again looking at his cards. "Dang me if I back down! Here's a five-dollar straddle. Meet it if you dare!"

At this challenge the gambler quietly laid down his cards, took out his pocket-book and extracted a bill, which he laid upon the table.

"There, my spry rooster," he grimly declared, "there's a clean fifty. Fork out now, or I'll rake the pile."

"Here's to meet it, then, and a hundred better," exclaimed Jim, extracting a folded paper from his pocket and slamming it on the table. "There's what's good for considerable more money. It's my rake now, if you don't pony down."

"Here's your pony." The gambler placed two more fifty-dollar bills on the table. "I call your hand. Show up."

The two spectators looked on with intense interest as Jim flung his cards on the table, face up, and called out in a triumphant tone:

"Four tens."

"A good hand, but not good enough," his opponent dryly responded, throwing down his own cards. "Four queens beats, and rakes the board."

Jim looked at the cards with affected dismay, while the gambler swept the cash triumphantly from the table.

"You've salted me, neighbor," remarked the youthful gamester. "But this check tops the pile, so you'll please fork over the change."

He opened the folded paper as he spoke, and laid it on the table in front of his opponent, upon whom he keenly fixed his eyes.

The latter glanced carelessly at his prize; then gave it a close scrutiny, and fell suddenly back in his chair with a face as white as a grave-cloth. "Good God, that paper!" he groaned. "Where, in Heaven's name, did you get— By all that's good, this is some juggling trick!" he fiercely interrupted himself. "I'll settle that game."

He sprung forward in his chair, and clutched eagerly for the paper.

"Hold yer level, neighbor," cried Jim, jerking his hand from his pocket, and laying it on the mysterious document. The hand held a revolver.

"That's a card in the game you didn't calkulate on, when you put up them cards so neatly. Jist you mind yer eye now, or I'll bore you. Didn't build on seein' that little dokyment, hey?"

"Who in the fiend's name are you?" demanded the discomfited gambler, still deathly pale.

"Folks down our way call me Jolly Jim, the detective," answered the boy. "That was a mighty neat job, that forgery. Thought I'd nail you with it. This is a forged check," he explained to the landlord and the countryman. "That man passed it. I've got a warrant here for his arrest. Is there a constable in this town?"

"Yes," answered the landlord.

"Then jist show him that warrant, and ax to step up here. Hold yer hosses now," he cried to the forger, who had made a movement as if to escape. "Ye're goin' back to York with me, and I'd sooner take you alive than dead. But you've got to go in some shape."

The landlord returned to the room.

"I have sent for him," he said.

"All correck. We'll have up that supper now jist as soon as you please. Like to have this gentleman take supper with me, but I'm afeard I've spoilt his appetite."

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW SPOKE IN THE WHEEL.

It was the morning after the date of the occurrences mentioned in the last chapter. Jim had given his captive into the hands of the village constable for the night, but was now taking him himself down the river to the city. It might seem a rash effort for a boy to take in hand an old criminal like this, but it must be remembered that Jim was eighteen years of age, and although small-sized, he had the strength of

a man. His prisoner, on the contrary, was a small, spare person, by no means Jim's equal in muscular strength. The young detective had, besides, another advantage.

"We'll sail together jist like two bees in a clover-field, if you keep quiet," he remarked to his captive. "But if you try to double on me, look out for an earthquake."

The forger looked cautiously around him, and then approached his lips to Jim's ear.

"See here, young man," he said, "you're making a blunder as I told you. You've got hold of the wrong man. But I don't want to waste time in proving that it's all a mistake, for I've got some important business in Colorado. So I won't mind handing you over something neat to let me slide. You're not so rich but what a neat hundred-dollar bill or so would be something to you. You'll not get ten dollars for taking me to New York."

"Now jist dry up!" cried the indignant boy.

"If I had to live on a 'skeeter's wing a day, and you was to offer me a whole mounting of roast chickens, I wouldn't touch a drum-stick of 'em. Put that in yer pipe and smoke it. I'm paid to do my duty, and I'm goin' to do it like a man. If I only got the scrapings of a nickel cent, and you was to offer me a gold mine, I'd stick to the nickel. That's me. Now shet up. I'm goin' to hand you over, dead or alive, and there ain't money enough in New York City to buy me."

Jim's tone was so decided that his tempter became silent. The boy was incorruptible.

They were now well down the river, and in a half hour more would land at the New York wharf.

For some time the forger sat brooding, without a word coming from his lips. Jim leaned back on his seat, enjoying the ride with boyish zest. But the seeming melancholy of his prisoner touched him somewhat, and he remarked:

"Cheer up, old chap. There's no use gettin' down-hearted 'bout it. You only caught what you've been fishin' fer, and most o' folks is satisfied with that. Guess you'll git a warm room and plenty of grub, and that's what some folks don't git that's got all outside to spread in. You've got to go down, for the forgery's nailed dead on you. Ain't been long in that bizness, eh? 'Tain't a payin' one."

The prisoner looked sharply at his captor, and a new thought seemed to come into his mind. He answered as follows:

"I have something to tell you in confidence. I did sign another name than my own once before."

Jim looked up in surprise.

"S'pose you jist put a curb on yer tongue. I ain't axin' you to sell yerself for nothin'."

"I have confidence in you," returned the prisoner. "I know I can trust you. A rich New York merchant hired me to write a name for him. Who is the criminal in that? I got paid for a specimen of my handwriting; that was all. What he got by it I can't say."

"What are you tellin' me this for?" asked Jim, suspiciously.

"I hardly know. Maybe I can get this man to take up the forged check and let me off. You are a sharp fellow. You might negotiate the affair for me."

"Who is this merchant?" asked Jim.

"Mr. Paul Wilkins."

"Oh, Lawsee!"

Jim sprung to his feet, and danced a war-dance on the steamer's deck. He flung his hat into the air and caught it in his teeth. His laugh of triumph drew the attention of the neighboring passengers to his wild antics.

"What is the matter with you?" asked the prisoner.

"It's jist as good as a circus," exclaimed Jim.

"Why, I'd guv a ten-acre lot to git a ring in that rooster's nose. I'm arter that man like a brick arter a cur dog. Let it all out. What name was it you writ' for him?"

"I can trust you?"

"Yes, with anything 'cept hot doughnuts."

"Then, it was his wife's name."

"His wife? Why, she's in the mad-house."

"That's what he said. She was insane, and not fit to sign her own name, and it was some business that needed her signature."

"What kind of a docyment was it?"

"I can't say. Only it looked like a deed, or a mortgage."

"You didn't think it was square?"

"I knew he was a villain," answered the forger. "But he paid me well, and I did not fancy it would hurt an insane woman."

Jim cogitated a moment.

"You're a pair o' rascals together," he declared. "So you want to squeeze Mr. Wilkins, and I'm to do the squeezin'?"

"Just so. Make him take up and destroy this check. That won't be out of the line of your duty, and I can afford to pay you for the service."

"I dunno any persimmon I'd sooner squeeze," answered the delighted boy. "I don't want no pay. It'll be pay enough to hear him squeal. But I never do nothin' 'cept Harry Keen says the word. Guess we'll go to his office and talk over this bizness. Maybe he'll let off the little fish to catch the big one."

One hour afterward Jim landed his prisoner safely in Harry Keen's office.

The detective was in his office when they entered, and looked up in some surprise.

"Back already, Jim? That's lively. Who's your friend?"

"It's only Mr. Jack Masters, the gent I was sent arter, who has got sich an amazin' short memory 'bout names."

"The deuce! Not Jack Masters, the forger?"

"The same, at your service," bowed the prisoner.

"Hang me if you ain't a jewel, Jim. There's not a man on the force could have done it quicker. I only sent you to nose him out."

"And I roped him in," answered the pleased boy. "Like to have a bit of advice, Mr. Keen; that's what brung me here. Calkerlate I've opened another rat-hole to-day that's got a bigger rat than this in it."

"What's that?" asked the detective, pushing away his writing. "Sit down, Mr. Masters. Fortune of war, you know. Guess we'll find you nice quiet apartments, where you won't be disturbed by organ-grinders. Go ahead, Jim. Let's have your story."

The boy proceeded to tell what the reader has

already heard, the tale of the forging of the name of Paul Wilkins's wife to an important document. A shrewd look came on the detective's face as he proceeded. He looked inquiringly at the forger, who nodded assent.

"Sharp in you, my friend," he said. "You deserve to get off. I am after Paul Wilkins just now, and if he can only be scared to buy you off he will just sink himself deeper into the mire. So you forged his wife's name?"

"Yes. She was insane, he said, and could not be got to write it herself."

"No more insane than you are. He is a precious rascal. Has locked her up in an insane asylum to steal her property. Wait, I want to find out what that paper was."

He hurriedly left the room, leaving Jim alone with his captive. But the latter, satisfied that all was working favorably, remained quiet.

The detective was absent for nearly half an hour. When he returned there was a look of satisfaction on his face.

"A very neat piece of business," he announced. "I have traced the paper. It is a conveyance of the whole of Mrs. Wilkins's private estate to himself. A cool fifty thousand dollars gobbled up in a mouthful. By Jove, it is a sharp transaction! I can see right through it. The poor lady refuses to sign. He torments her in vain. Finally he takes a new dodge. He has her name forged; brings in two rascals of doctors to pronounce her out of her mind, and bundles her off to a mad house, while he sits down to swallow the proceeds. Devilish keen! Do you know, my man, you are a con-founded rogue?"

"Yes," answered the forger, meekly. "But I didn't know all this. Why not take the woman out if she's falsely imprisoned?"

"It is not so easily done. She is put there according to law. We must put the nippers on Paul Wilkins, if we want her out. Or else make a raid on the asylum. They will hang on like grim death."

"Maybe I can be of some service," remarked the forger. "I'm used to underground work. Get me out of this scrape, and I will pledge myself to help get the woman off."

"You can't get out except the money is paid," said the detective.

"And Paul Wilkins has got to pay that," declared Jim. "Jist give me that job. I'm the lad fur him. It'll be the biggest fun out, jist to pay him up for the way he pelted it on me t'other day. I'm goin' to 'stonish him a bit, now you bet."

CHAPTER IX.

A STROLL IN QUEER QUARTERS.

IN the wide corridor of a large building stood four persons, Gilbert Bacon, Harry Keen, the detective, Jolly Jim his *protege*, and Jack Masters the forger. The building itself was gloomy enough to be a prison. Outside it was surrounded with a high wall, and displayed only narrow, high windows, many of them barred. Inside it was heavy and somber, while the few persons one met had a stolid, stern look, as if they had spent all their lives guarding prisoners.

After a few minutes one of these persons joined the group, and remarked:

"There are too many of you. I cannot take more than two. You, Mr. Bacon and Mr. Keen. The other gentlemen must wait. They may amuse themselves in looking about the establishment."

The two persons named followed him, leaving the boy and the forger alone.

"Anyhow you mought have told us what it's all about," growled Jim. "Here's you and me ordered to meet these gentlemen here, and 'fore we kin find out what sort of a catamount's loose, they slide off, and leave us standin' like a pair o' twin donkeys. What sort of a 'stablishment is it, anyhow?"

"Shoot me if I know!" answered Masters. "It might be a lock-up, or it might be a hen-coop for stray humans. It's a mighty odd-looking contraption."

"I'm a-goin' to find out," declared Jim, decisively. "'Tain't my way to wait till I'm told. Let's investigate the consarn."

"I'm with you," answered Masters.

They proceeded forward along the corridor. They found the building more extensive than they had imagined. Other long passages branched off to the right and left, with rows of doors on each side. From behind these doors many odd sounds came to their ears. Some of these seemed like groans. Others were yelping sounds, as of chained beasts.

"It might be a menagerie or a dog-pound," remarked Masters. "Do you hear that yelp? It's enough to make a man's blood crawl."

"There's a chap ahead," said Jim. "Let's interview him and diskiver what sort of a pigeon-roost it is."

The man referred to was an oddly dressed individual, with a heavy, ill-favored countenance and a peculiar sidelong look out of his eyes. Ere reaching him they passed the entrance to a side passage, in which another person appeared.

"You go for the old coon. I'll take this one," remarked Jim, turning into the passage.

The person he approached was a greater oddity yet than the other. His clothes were adorned with bits of colored ribbon, sewed on in queer patterns. His hat rim was cut into angular points, and formed a sort of dilapidated crown. His face wore an expression of blank simplicity. He approached the boy with an air of utter surprise.

"How did you get here?" he asked. "I thought there wasn't any one here but me. Did you come in a balloon?"

"Come afoot," answered Jim shortly.

"That's a lie. There ain't no road. You must have come in a balloon or been shot up out of a cannon."

"I must, hey?" answered the mystified boy. "See here, mister, ain't you an infernal fool?"

"You haven't found that out already?" asked the man, with an air of chagrin. "We're all fools, the whole family, and somehow everybody finds it out at first sight. I came here because it was the place for wise people. But it's no use. Everybody knows I'm a fool at sight."

"The place for wise people, eh?" said Jim, looking around him. "What do you call this place, then? I'm astray here."

"Thought you were," answered the man, with a gleeful laugh. "Nobody but strays get here. I'm a stray too. Why, boy, it's the moon. I don't know how I got here, but it is the moon."

Jim cast an angry look at the speaker, with the instinctive idea that he was being made game of. But the man's face was so guileless and innocent that the lad did not know what to think of his preposterous statement.

"Sure it's the moon?" he asked.

"If you'd lived here as long as I have you'd be sure of it," was the reply. "Are you going to stay?"

"Don't know. Haven't made up my mind yit," answered Jim. "I'm afeard a chap mought catch cold at nights."

"Do stay," said the man, catching him by a button, and looking up into his face with a look of eager simplicity. "It's kind of lonely fer only one man in the moon. It'd be a nice place, if there was company. There's no taxes to pay here, like there is down below. And you can have all the sugar you want on your bread and butter. Won't you stay?"

"That last is a big 'ducement," said Jim, with a grave countenance. "But s'pose a chap wants cream in his coffee?"

"There ain't no cows," answered the man mournfully.

"Then count me out. Can't go coffee without cream, if I have the whole moon thrown in to boot."

While Jim was holding this odd conversation, his companion found himself confronted with as queer a customer. He had nothing of the mildness and simplicity of the other, but there was an incipient fierceness in the wild roll of his eyes. He approached quickly, and laid his skinny hand on Masters's shoulder.

"I want you," he said, in a sepulchral tone. "I want to borrow something from you."

"It might be something I don't want to lend," answered Masters.

"But you must lend it," a keen glare shot from his eyes. "I have lost my brains. I have nothing but a hollow here." He struck his knuckles sharply on his head. "And I have lost my heart. I am all body. I have no heart and no soul. I've been sent adrift in the world to borrow them."

"The deuce you havel" exclaimed Masters, backing off. "Just suppose you excuse me. I prefer not to lend just now."

"But you must. It won't hurt you. You've got more brains than you want, and I've got none. My head is all filled up with wind."

"If you blow away at this rate you'll soon have no wind there either," ejaculated Masters.

"I am commissioned to furnish myself with a brain and heart. If they are refused I must take them by force," cried the man, advancing rapidly on Masters.

The forger retreated in affright. He was beginning to recognize the true state of affairs. He was alone with a madman. The latter pushed forward, crowded him into a corner of the corridor, and laid his hand with nervous energy on the shoulders of the scared visitor. He thrust his other hand into his pocket, as if for a knife.

"I must have that brain," he muttered. "And

I refuse to go any longer without a heart. I've been robbed, and I must have them back."

It was decidedly a critical situation, for Masters was like a feather in the hands of the furious lunatic, whose eyes glared upon him with concentrated wildness.

Meanwhile the boy, more fortunate, had escaped from his moonstruck companion, and roamed on, in a bewildered maze, without dreaming of the dangerous position of his late associate.

"It's gittin' wuss nor ever," he exclaimed. "Can't see a bit o' daylight through the consarn. That chap didn't look as if he was playin' on me, but it stands to reason he must. Nobody in his sober senses could be sich a ridick'lous idiot."

It did not occur to Jim that the man was out of his sober senses. He had a notion in his head that it was some effort at a practical joke.

He now descended a flight of stairs, and into a lower range of passages, through which there came appetizing odors, significant of the kitchen.

"Gittin' into the merits of the consarn now," muttered the boy. "The cookin' department ain't fur off. Hello! there's dry goods. Guess I'll tongue it a bit more."

This elegant expression was called out by the appearance of a girl in the passage before him. As he approached he saw that she had a very pretty face, with the Irish type of features.

"Wonder if she's moon-struck, too?"

She certainly did not seem so, and her eyes were fixed on Jim with a look of pleased recognition.

As he approached she sprung hastily forward, with a welcoming laugh.

"Sure an' I knowed it! It's Jolly Jim! How are ye, Jim? And ye ain't niver forgot Biddy Mulligan, your old sweetheart as ye used to call her?"

"Biddy Mulligan, for all that's good!" exclaimed the boy, seizing her hands and drawing her to him. "Well, it's enough to take my breath! Give me a buss, Biddy, as you used to do of old."

"I niver did, you rogue," cried the blushing girl. "Faix, you always used to take 'em, widout so much as axin'."

"And I ain't furgot the way yit," exclaimed the daring boy, as he snatched a kiss from the girl's rosy lips. "If you're goin' to hang out sech blossoms as that the bees is sure to settle on 'em."

"Oh, go away wid you for a blatherin' rogue!" She pushed him off with affected displeasure.

"But what forever brings you here, Biddy? I haven't set my eyes on you for more nor a year. I thought for sure you was married and gone West."

"I've been waitin' for you, Jim." Biddy blushed and cast down her eyes, but there was a sly look upward out of their corners. "You know what you promised."

"There's not many prettier than yourself, anyway, and I mought go further and fare wuss." He took her hand again. "But what brings you here? And what sort of place is this, anyhow?"

"Sure an' you must know?" she demanded, with surprise.

"Sorry the bit I know."

"How iver did you get in here, then? That's mighty quare. Why, it's a mad-house, Jim. An insane asylum. And I'm one of the cooks."

The boy stood for a minute as if he had been struck by a bullet. He felt at first like punching his head that this had not occurred to him before. Then he burst into a wild laugh, and danced with amusement.

"To think of me bein' sich a ridick'lous crank! I met Harry Keen in this village, and he never let out where we were goin'. I see it all now. It's here that Mrs. Wilkins is locked up."

"True for you, Jim. That poor soul is here, But how did you iver know it?"

"'Cause she's no more crazy nor you and me. And she's got to come out of this here consarn now, you bet."

"Mercy on us, ye're enough to take my breath! Do you know"—here her voice sunk to a whisper—"I've surmised the same thing myself. I've tended on the poor lady, and she's as swate and soft-hearted as a baby."

"She's got to come out, Biddy, and I may want your help."

He was interrupted by a call of his name from above.

"Ay, ay!" he answered. "I've got to go now, but where kin I meet you, sweetheart?"

"I don't slape in the house. Ye can see me any night at Molly Malone's, my cousin, at the end of the village."

"Good-by, then, and keep this to remember me."

Another stolen kiss, a vigorous slap, a laugh, and Jim was off.

While Jim was going through this pleasant experience, Jack Masters had not been so agreeably situated. Fortunately, just as he was bracing himself for a struggle with the lunatic, the latter released him and shrunk back like a whipped cur. Looking behind him, Masters saw one of the keepers, whose approach had caused this change of base.

"At your old tricks again?" he asked, sternly, of the lunatic. "I knew it was a mistake to give you the run of the house. You'll have to go back to your old quarters. Come with me, sir. It is only the harmless ones we let run. I see this fellow is not safe out."

"This is a lunatic asylum, then?"

"Yes. Did you not know it?"

"If I had you wouldn't have found me strolling around here alone. I haven't much brains of my own, and have none to lend to your empty-headed patients."

A few minutes afterward Mr. Gilbert and the detective returned. Jim was missing, but a call soon brought him into sight, and the four visitors left the asylum together.

CHAPTER X.

LAYING OUT WORK.

"How's the little gal, mammy?"

Jim was just up, and his face was rosy with the hard scrubbing he had given it.

"She's as spruce as a bird," answered the old lady. "I never see'd such a sweet little critter. Why, she creeps into one's heart like a bee into a clover blossom. But whoever is she, Jimmy; and wherever in the world did you get her?"

"Her daddy's a rich old rascal," answered Jim, "and her mammy's in the 'sylum for crazy folks. The little girl was stolen, and I found her and fetched her home. And I've jist got a notion to freeze onto her, for I don't like her daddy fur nothin'."

"It won't do, Jimmy. You'll get into trouble."

"Nary time," answered Jim, as he hastily devoured his breakfast. "I'm jist keepin' her till I find out her right owner. But I tell you, mammy, there's fun. He's got a detective out huntin' the gal, and I've jist been watchin' that feller pokin' his nose around. It's 'stonishin', the lot o' things he's smelt out, but he ain't goin' to smell out the gal. Nobody'd think o' lookin' round these diggin's."

"I'm desperate afeard there'll be trouble," persisted the old lady.

"Not much," cried the reckless boy. "I've got my eye-teeth cut. It's jist the jolliest job out. Lawsee! there she comes toddlin' low. Come, here, you little lump of 'lasses candy."

The child had just entered the room, her sweet, pretty face full of smiles, till she brightened the dull apartment like a rose in a wilderness. Evidently she enjoyed her new quarters. Jim, particularly, seemed to have found the soft place in her heart, and she ran eagerly to him on his invitation.

"Jist climb up here, little rosebud, and have some breakfast," he said, as he lifted her to his knee. "Carried you 'most all one night, little lady-bug, and you dunno how you squealed. Skeered 'most to death, you was. Ain't 'feard of me now?"

"Me likes you," lisped the child. "You's ever so nice. Kith me."

"Won't I, then?" He kissed the innocent, upturned mouth, and hugged the affectionate child to his side. "Don't you wish we could keep little bright-eyes straight on, mammy? She's jist as sweet as two spoonfuls of sugar."

"Me wants to see my mamma," declared the child, with a clouded face.

"There, Jimmy, you hear that? The child's pining now for her parents."

"Much she's pinin'," exclaimed Jim. "It's grub she's pinin' fur. Jist take hold, Lucy, and help me eat my breakfast. Here's the nicest fried 'taters, and b'longy sassage. And you kin have a whole cup of coffee; can't she, mammy?"

"Half a cup," said the old lady, resolutely, "filled up with hot water."

"D'ye hear that, Lucy? I never kin have my own way. Mammy's allers a-crowdin' on me. Anyhow, you shall have some hot cakes and 'lasses."

The child laughed and crowed, in perfect content and delight.

Breakfast over there followed a game of romps, the wild boy tossing his little *protegee* about as if she was an india-rubber ball, until his mother was half wild with dread and concern.

"Now just quit that, you Jim! You'll hurt her. I know you will. Give her to me. You ain't fit to play with a baby."

"She ain't made o' glass, mammy," asserted Jim, as he flung the laughing child to the ceiling, and caught her in her fall.

"Give her to me," and the frightened old lady made a clutch for her.

"No, no, no!" screamed the child, knotting her chubby arms tightly around Jim's neck. "Me likes him best. Me wants to play. Jist frow me up again."

And the sport continued, despite the old lady's efforts, until the mischievous boy was worn out with labor and laughter. He then resigned the crooning child to his mother, with a good-by kiss, and a merry laugh.

"I'm off, sweetheart. Got bizness in hand this mornin'. Goin' to see your daddy. He's a high old hoss, is your daddy; but I guess he'll find me a lively little mule."

Jim was off like a flash. He had announced the truth. A visit to Mr. Wilkins, in company with Jack Masters, was his errand that morning.

The merchant looked up with an air of surprise, that deepened into displeasure, as the boy entered his private office in his free and independent manner.

"What brings you here?" he harshly demanded. "Get out now, you insolent young dog, before I send for the porters to toss you out into the gutter."

"Jist send fur them there coons if you want to see somebody 'stonished," answered Jim. "I'm here on bizness this mornin'. Got a gentleman friend as I'd like to interduce to you."

"Deuce take you and your friends! Be off now, while I keep my temper. Ha! Who's that?"

The merchant's face grew pale. The door had at that moment opened and admitted Jim's companion.

"Only a gent as axed me to interduce him, seein's we was old friends."

"Masters! What brings you here?" faltered the discomfited merchant.

"A little matter of private business," rejoined Masters, coolly. "Got into some trouble, and thought, being as I used to know you, maybe you'd help me out."

The merchant looked angry and troubled. He cast a disquieted glance at Jim.

"Hope I ain't intrudin'," remarked the self-possessed boy. "Guess I'll git out, and let you have yer private confab. I'm only to keep an eye open fur this slippery gent, but guess I kin watch him through a glass door."

Jim, without further ado, turned his back and closed the door behind him. It had been thought best by Harry Keen, for certain reasons, to let the interview between the two confederates be held in private.

A long talk ensued inside—an angry talk too, as it seemed, for an occasional loud word reached the boy's ears outside. Frequently, too, Masters made gestures toward his youthful guard, as if threatening to reveal the merchant's secret. Finally, Jim, growing impatient, poked his head in at the door.

"Guess we'd best slide, Mr. Jack Masters," he said. "Kin see you was foolin' us 'bout Mr. Wilkins bein' your friend. Ye're in fur the Island, and no mistake. Can't play no more dodges on me and Harry Keen."

"One minute."

The forger looked meaningfully at the merchant,

who, after an instant's hesitation, made an angry gesture of assent.

"It's all right, my boy," cried Masters gladly; "this gentleman is my friend, as I told you. He's going to take up the check. Just wait for one minute."

A few more words in private, and the forger came out, a look of triumph on his face.

"I squeezed him," he said to Jim, as they reached the street. "I didn't let him dream that you knew anything, and I threatened to blow the whole business if he didn't plank down. That fetched him."

"Guess he'd let you pulled both his eye teeth sooner," declared Jim. "Lawsee! it's as good as a play to pinch old Wilkins. Didn't make him no promises?"

"Yes, I promised to keep quiet about the forged signature."

"That's safe enough 'long as you've blowed it a'ready."

Harry Keen was alone in the office when they entered. A few words revealed the result of the interview.

"Very well," he remarked. "I will see that the check is put in bank for him to take up when he likes. But that is not all, Jack Masters. What else was it you promised him? You're to go West, I judge; or to take ship for England, eh?"

"Not a bit of it," exclaimed Masters, but there was a look in his eyes which he could not conceal from the shrewd detective.

"See here," cried the latter, "that cock won't crow. I am not letting you out of this scrape for charity. You are building on playing dumb about the forged signature to the deed."

Masters declared that he had no such intention, but he wasted his words on the sharp-eyed detective.

"Perhaps you imagined I was a fool," said the latter. "I am not having that check taken up for any love of you, but to get a ring in Paul Wilkins's nose. As for you, Jack Masters, I know you better than you think. There was a little hush-up job done in Brooklyn four years ago. Do I touch you now, my man?"

The forger turned pale.

"Now mind you," continued the officer, "I'm not anxious to lock you up, or open old sores against you. You're locked up in this city now, as safely as if you were in the Tombs. Try to leave it, and you will find out. You'll be snatched as a hawk snatches a chicken. I've got work for you, and am going to hang onto you. But I'm a square man, Jack Masters. Play me fair and I'll play you fair. Go back on me, and I'll come down on you like a hod of bricks on a nigger's head. Is it a bargain?"

"Yes," answered the forger.

"Very well. You are free now till I want you. But keep me posted where you are to be found. If you try any trickery look out for me. I never renew an offer."

The forger left the office, as if glad to escape from his questioner, leaving Jim and the detective alone.

"Ain't you afeard he'll slide?" asked the boy.

"No. He knows me. And he's a coward. Tell a fellow like that there's an eye on him and

he'll imagine a thousand. I'm going for your friend, Mr. Wilkins."

"What's up?" asked Jim. "Didn't know that you'd tuk any job ag'in' him."

"Yes. I am engaged by Mr. Bacon. That's what took us to the asylum. The poor lady is melancholy, my boy, but she is no more insane than you or I."

"Then why not fotch her out?"

"It is not easy. It's mighty slow work to do that through the courts, and I am afeard she'll go stark mad before it's over. The loss of her child weighs heavy on her."

"Then steal her out."

"By Jove, I would, if I knew how."

Their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of two persons, whom Jim recognized at a glance as Gilbert Bacon and the young gentleman with whom he had had a midnight adventure, the keeper of the stolen child.

They looked doubtfully at the boy, who was balancing himself on a chair in the corner.

"Never mind him," said the detective. "He knows all about it. You may remember I had him at the asylum the other day, when I thought it possible we might make a countermarch on them and run the lady out by force. That failed, as you know."

"Yes. And now what's to be done?"

A conversation ensued between the three men, Jim keeping silent, but listening intently. They could see their way clearly to nothing but an appeal to the courts, with the possibility that the melancholy prisoner might lose her senses in reality, through grief at her separation from her child.

"Why don't you guv her the baby?" asked Jim innocently, "and cheer her up?"

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Bacon.

"Paul Wilkins says as how you've got it, and I calkerlate he ain't fur out. Mebbe this here gentleman mought know summat 'bout it." He pointed to Mr. Bacon's companion.

They both started violently at this assertion, and looked strangely at the boy, whose face wore a blank expression.

"What the deuce you mean?" cried the young man. "I'll tell you this. The child was stolen from Mr. Wilkins, and has been stolen again from its kidnappers. No one knows where it is, and I hope it has not come to any harm. I know he has detectives on our track, so he must be as much in the dark as we. I'd give something fine to find where she is."

"How much would you give?" asked Jim.

"A hundred dollars on the nail."

"And I will top it with a thousand," exclaimed Mr. Bacon.

"All right. If I see her layin' 'round loose I'll pick her up," answered the provoking boy. "And what'll you give to git Mrs. Wilkins out of the 'sylum?"

"As much more," answered Mr. Bacon.

"I'm yer boss, then. Jist put by that two thousand two hundred, fer I'm goin' to 'arn it; and mighty sudden, too."

"What's all this, Jim?" cried the detective. "You ain't playing none of your boy's games on us?"

"I mean bizness," answered Jim, stolidly.

"I'm goin' to 'arn that reward. If I fotch the

lady out of the 'sylum, put her baby in her arms, and squeeze old Wilkins to give her a divorce, what'll the job be wu'th in the lump?"

"I'll pay five thousand to the man or boy that can do it," exclaimed Mr. Bacon, excitedly.

"And I'm the boy as is goin' to do it," answered Jim, confidently.

CHAPTER XI.

A MIDNIGHT RAID.

"SURE an' I don't like to, Jim."

"Sure an' you must, Biddy."

It was Jolly Jim and his old friend Biddy Mulligan between whom these words passed. Night had fallen and they were alone in a dark street of the village on whose outskirts the private lunatic asylum was situated.

"I'll be after losing my place if they diskiver it," she protested.

"I'll get you a better one in the twinkle of a 'skeeter's eye," he declared.

"But mebbe they'd be locking me up in a cell, 'mong the mad folks. It's stark mad I'd go if they did," and Biddy held up her hands with a look of horror on her young face.

"Jist let 'em try it!" exclaimed Jim, bravely. "Do you know what I'd do if they'd even think of sich a thing, Biddy?"

"Faix and I don't."

"Then I'll not tell you, fer it'd skeer you blue jist to hear it. Them coons won't fool their time with me, you bet."

Jim wisely kept his secret, for he had not the most remote idea what he would do if such a thing were really to happen.

"Indade and I'm skeered 'most out o' my life now, wid the bare thoughts of it," she declared.

"Come now, Biddy sweetheart, I'm going with you," implored Jim. "I bet we go through that place jist like a rat through a knot-hole."

The bold boy slid his arm around her yielding waist, and led her on, trembling, yet too well pleased with the situation to resist. Through the village and on until the dark mass of the asylum loomed up through the night, they continued their course, the frightened girl cheered by the bold assurance of her companion.

"The lady's got to come out o' there," he declared. "Jist think of it, Biddy. I'm to have five thousand dollars for the job. Then I know where there's a sweet little gal fur a wife, and a neat little farm that'll grow 'taters like wild, and a tasty little house with honeysuckles growin' all over it, and— Will you go with me, Biddy?"

"Come on, and be done wid your blarney," exclaimed the girl, her fancy captivated by this alluring picture. "Sure, and they can't no more than hang us, anyhow."

They had gained the wall of the asylum, whose dark mass hid them from observation. It was an extensive building, with several wings. A high wall behind it inclosed a large space of ground. The building itself was dark and massive, its narrow upper windows having outside bars, while the lower windows were firmly closed and locked. A large main entrance door and two smaller side doors formed the only visible entrances to the establishment.

"You've got the key all right?" he asked.

"Yes. I was the last to l'ave the night, an' by misthake I dropped the kay in my pocket jist," she declared, with a sly laugh. "An' as for the poor leddy's room, sure I've been waitin' on her, an' I know well where they k'ape the kay."

"Ye're a jewel!" exclaimed Jim, pressing her hand. "I'd guv you a buss fer yer wit, only—"

"Only what, Jim?" asked Biddy.

"Only I'm afeard you wouldn't like it."

"You rogue! I'll box your ears well if you so much as try it."

"Now that's a challenge," exclaimed the daring boy, seizing her hands and pressing a kiss on her willing lips. "Now come ahead, Biddy, and don't be after any more sich nonsense."

He ran on, pursued by the laughing girl.

An open area adjoined the house on this side, with steps descending from the level of the ground floor. Down this Biddy led to a basement door that opened into partly underground apartments.

Taking a key from her pocket, the girl cautiously inserted it in the lock of this door.

"You turn it, Jim," she asked. "I'm a thrembling so that I haven't the strength of a mouse."

Her companion was troubled with no such timidity. He quickly turned the key and opened the door. Before them lay a long, gloomy apartment.

"It's the kitchen of the 'sylum," she whispered, as she led the way in.

Jim closed the door behind him, throwing the room in utter darkness. But Biddy knew her way well, and seized his hand to lead him onward. Some steps they took through the darkness, ending by Jim's kicking over a chair, which fell to the floor with a clatter that came to their ears like thunder.

Biddy hastily retreated into the arms of her bolder companion, and lay there trembling in affright.

"Oh, the blessed Vargin!" she exclaimed. "Sure, an' we're cl'ane done for now."

"Hold yer whist!" demanded Jim, angrily. "Ye're makin' more noise nor the cheer. Keep quiet, and listen a bit."

Listen they did, for full five minutes, but no sound came to their ears.

"The coast's clear yit," declared Jim, joyfully. "Can't ye strike a match, and guv us a glimmer o' light? It's not safe to take a step 'mong yer traps and contraptions."

"K'ape where you are for a minute."

Biddy left him. Soon there came the scratching sound of a match, and a gleam of light shot through the room. A long wide apartment was displayed, with great ranges and ovens, and all the paraphernalia of a kitchen.

"I b'lieve that cheer was put there a-purpose," declared Jim, as he picked up the fallen chair from the middle of the floor.

Meanwhile Biddy had found and lit a lamp, which she turned down until only a dim light broke the darkness of the room. The young scout advanced to the passage beyond, where he listened intently. Only some vague sounds

came to his ears, which might be the unquiet noises of the locked-up patients.

"The keepers make rounds every two hours through the night, you say?" he demanded.

"So I'm told. But it'll be an hour before they go again. But the watchman is on duty all night."

"Where?"

"In a little room just beyant the office. He's a sharp one, Jim."

"So's we, Biddy. Come ahead."

Stealthily along the dark passage they stole, and up the broad stair that lay beyond. The girl's heart beat like a trip-hammer, and every creak of a board went through her like a thunder-clap. She trod as gingerly as if she was walking on eggs.

"Was there iver the loike of them stairs?" she whispered. "Just listen till their noise now!"

"Whist, Biddy," cautioned Jim. "Step boldly, gal. It makes 'em wuss to go tiptoeing."

The floor above reached, this difficulty was avoided. It was paved with stone slabs that gave no echo to their tread. The passages here were dimly lighted by lamps that burned low at each extremity.

They moved onward stealthily but swiftly, Jim's keen eyes heedfully exploring every passage, while the frightened girl moved crouchingly behind him, afraid now to go either forward or back. He took her hand and reassured her by his firm grasp.

"Nothin' to be skeered at, Biddy," he declared. "The coast's clear. Where's them keys, gal? We'll be through the job in a jiffy."

His voice was full of assured hope. Everything had gone so swimmingly as yet that he began to feel sure of success. Hastily bidding him to wait, the girl slipped into an empty room in the passage, and in a moment returned with a small bunch of keys.

"I've got 'em," she whispered, clutching them tightly to prevent any rattling. "We're a'most there now. It's just round the corner beyant."

The boy's eyes were keenly observing the landmarks of their passage. He was not satisfied to trust to the memory of his flustered guide. She led onward now with feverish haste, her face burning red with nervous anxiety.

"Here it is," she declared, stopping hastily before a door. "And this is the master key to all the doors on this line."

"Sure it's the right one?" asked Jim, doubtfully, as a low, odd sound came from the room.

"Yes! yes! Open it quick! It's desperat'ly frightened I am."

"Keep quiet in there!" said Jim through the keyhole. "It's only friends that's comin'."

The noises within hushed, and a breathless silence supervened.

In a moment he had unlocked the door and flung it open. A half-choked cry of alarm came from Biddy's lips, as she fell back nervelessly against the opposite wall.

"Shut it! shut it!" she hastily exclaimed. "Mother of mercy, it's a mistake I've made, and we've let out a raving lunatic. Oh, wirra! wirra! What's to be the end of it all?"

Jim had discovered the error as quickly as she in the distorted face and glaring eyes of the

figure before him. It was a woman, but with a face like a wild beast. He strove to slam the door shut again, but he was too late. With a snarling cry, the released lunatic sprang into the passage, and with a yell enough to make the blood run cold, she rushed down the long corridor, heedless of the two persons near her.

"By the seven devils, we've done it now in earnest!" cried Jim. "There'll be thunder and lightnin' 'round our ears in a cat's wink. What the deuce is to do? The hull house'll be up, and they'll snap us up whichever way we run."

Biddy was resting in a half faint against the opposite wall, echoing with faint cries of "Wirra! wirra!" the distant screams of the escaped maniac.

A suggestion came to the boy's quick mind. He tore the keys from the door, and seized the girl by the arm, shaking her into consciousness of the situation.

"There's not a second to waste on that nonsense!" he angrily declared. "Where's Mrs. Wilkins's room, that's what I want to know. We may snatch her out and be off, while they've got their hands full of that wild critter."

Jim's decisive tone recalled Biddy to her lost wits. She quickly sprang forward, and halted at a door some steps further on.

"I'm sure of it this time," she declared.

"I hope to gracious you are. There was a tiger behind t'other. Hope this ain't a hyenar."

"Indade but it's the right one," she persisted.

"Oh, Jim, Jim, why for the wurreld did you iver bring me in here?"

Paying no attention to this incoherent question, Jim hastily applied the key, and opened the door. The building was now full of wild cries. As the roar of a lion arouses all the wild beasts in a menagerie, so had the yell of the maniac stirred up the whole establishment, and frightful noises resounded through the building. But all was quiet in this present room.

"Guess we're right this time," he muttered, as he opened the door more cautiously than he had done the previous one.

Looking through the open chink he saw the form of a tall, stately lady, dressed in black silk, and standing upright, with her hands pressed on her ears, while a look of affright marked her fair but sad face.

"Is this Mrs. Wilkins?" asked Jim.

"Sure an' it is," declared Biddy.

"Then come in, fur there'll be ructions outside afore a minute."

He caught the scared girl by the arm and jerked her hastily within the room, quickly closing and locking the door behind them. He was none too soon, as his sharp ears had warned him, for they were scarcely inside ere the sound of feet were heard, rapidly traversing the corridor.

"Be still as a mouse, ma'am," warned Jim, to the terrified inmate. "We're your friends."

The sounds outside increased. The whole house was evidently aroused, and the keepers were dashing forward in pursuit of the escaped maniac, whose screams could yet be heard from a distance.

"Who are you, and what has happened?" demanded the lady, in a trembling tone.

"We're friends of yourn. We're here to git

you out of this mad-house," declared Jim. "But we opened the wrong door, and let one of the tigers out of its cage. Jist wait till things quiet down, and we'll have you out yit."

"Oh, no! no!" declared the frightened woman, cowering back, and covering her face with her hands. "I dare not! I dare not! Oh! for mercy's sake, leave me!"

Biddy, who had somewhat recovered from her terror, sought to soothe the poor nerve-shattered lady. She remembered the girl, and clung to her like a withered leaf to a tree, but all coaxings to induce her to escape were vain. She was so utterly unnerved that her terror at the thought was pitiable.

"You must come, ma'am," exclaimed Jim, sternly. "We've ventured our lives for you, and won't go without you. Don't you want your little gal again? I've got it safe waiting for you."

"My babe! Where is it?" demanded the poor woman. "My husband deprived me of it, and shut me up here. Oh! do you really know where it is?"

"I'll take you square to it, and old Wilkins 'll be none the wiser," declared Jim. "Jist only git up yer courage, and come with us."

"Oh, no, no, no! I dare not!" cried the poor woman, clinging in an agony of terror to Biddy.

Jim was utterly nonplused. Here was a contingency on which he had not calculated. Coaxings, threats, appeals, were all in vain. The nervous system of the prisoner had been so utterly unstrung, that it was impossible to infuse a shadow of resolution in her weakened spirit. Jim was keen enough to see that, if not insane, she was on the verge of insanity. His present effort was defeated. It was impossible to get her out, particularly while the establishment was alarmed. But a new idea came to his mind which he determined to put into execution as soon as possible. At present there was but one thing to do, and that was to escape himself undiscovered.

"We've got to slide, Biddy," he said. "They're all off now chasin' the wild critter. We kin git away afore they come back."

"No, no!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilkins, still clinging to the girl. "She must not leave me! She must not leave me!"

"Indade and maybe I'd best stay," remarked Biddy. "I can asy get out and slip intil the kitchen in the mornin'. I'm afeard to l'ave this poor leddy alone, and I'm afeard to go."

"All right," said Jim. "I'll slide, then. Lock the door arter me, and keep quiet. Good-by. I'm off."

He slipped out into the corridor. The coast was clear. Noises, as of a struggle with the maniac, came from a distance. Stepping swiftly along the passages by which he had come, he gained unseen the stairs leading to the kitchen. In two minutes more he was in the open air outside.

"Mought as well had Mrs. Wilkins along as not, if she hadn't been so ridick'lously skeered," he declared, as he hurried away.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW MRS. WILKINS LET OUT THE CAT.

It was the afternoon of the day after that of

Jim's raid on the asylum. The boy's busy brain had been active through the night, working out the details of a new scheme, in consequence of which we now find him again at the asylum, in company with Harry Keen, the detective. They are holding an interview with one of the officers, a hard-faced and bullet-headed individual, with a trace of brutality in his countenance.

"I tell you there is not a better managed institution in the country," he half angrily declared. "If the courts would only let us alone, and attend to their own business, they'd show more good sense."

"The courts and you would hardly agree on that little point, my dear sir," said Harry, with quiet sarcasm. "A little wholesome watching is not amiss."

"What does it come to? They have never found anything wrong."

"There are suspicions that persons in their senses sometimes get in here, and don't get out again very easily."

"It is false!" cried the officer, hotly. "You do not know the cunning of the insane. This Mrs. Wilkins, now, whom you are so interested in, she's one of the kind who are as sensible as judges to visitors, but as mad as a March hare to their keepers. I wish you could see her in one of her tantrums. Why, one of that quiet sort got loose somehow last night, and you never saw such a time as we had. She nearly finished one of the keepers before we could secure her."

"Thought you kept 'em safe locked up at night," muttered Jim, curiously.

"So we do. I cannot imagine how the woman got out. The keys were all in place. Some confounded carelessness in one of the keepers, I imagine. The tiger's cage in a menagerie is sometimes left open, you know."

Jim breathed more freely. Nothing was suspected, then. Biddy must have gotten out safely, and replaced the keys. This was a matter of considerable importance to the boy. He was not anxious to have any special watch put on the establishment.

"How do you quiet them when they get into their tantrums?" asked Harry.

"By moral suasion only," answered the officer. "Kindness is the rule here, sir."

"Moral suasion, eh? And a clip over the head or a cold water bath when moral suasion won't work, I suppose?"

"Do you wish to insult the institution?" asked the officer, bridling up.

"Suppose we bury the hatchet for the present," laughed Harry. "And please save your soft sawder for somebody who has not had his eye-teeth cut; it is wasted on an old roadster like me. I know you and your institution pretty well, my dear sir. That will do. You will please let me see Mrs. Wilkins, who, by the way, is no madder than you or I."

"I hope you'll only catch her in one of her crazy fits, that's all. I'd like to open the eyes of some of you outsiders, who know so much more about our business than we do ourselves."

The shrewd detective answered with an incredulous smile, as he followed the officer from the office.

Jim listened with his tongue in his cheek, and saying "tally" to himself under his breath.

"You see our establishment is not a prison. This apartment is not locked," remarked the officer, as he laid his hand on the door of Mrs. Wilkins's room. "Of course we lock them in at night. There is no telling when they will take a mad fit, you know."

He knocked with great apparent deference on the door. It was opened by Mrs. Wilkins, whose soft, delicate face looked with surprise upon her visitors.

"I have called to see you at the request of your brother, Mrs. Wilkins," said the detective, politely.

"My brother!" she exclaimed, eagerly. "Is he well? Why did he not come with you?"

"He wished me to come alone. He is seeking evidence to free you from this false detention, and wishes me to test your sanity."

The poor lady laughed, a little bitterly.

"They who put me here know very well their objects," she indignantly replied. "I may lose my senses if this continues, but I fancy I have them yet. Ah! who is that?"

A quick color came into her face, and she stood transfixed with trembling eagerness, her eyes riveted on Jim, who had just come forward.

"It's only me, ma'am," he said, modestly.

"You!" she cried, with a wild look. "Was it not you who came to me at midnight, and coaxed me to fly with you from this place?"

"Me, ma'am?" cried Jim, backing off. "You aren't out o' yer senses are ye?"

"It was you; I know it was! Why—why did I not go with you? why did I let an idle terror overcome me?"

"I'm afeard you're dreamin'," muttered Jim, utterly dumfounded.

Here was a letting the cat out of the bag with a vengeance. What would the officer think?

The latter individual had heard these words with surprise and a momentary look of suspicion. This was followed by a triumphant glance at the detective, as if to say:

"I told you so."

"You spoke to me of my child, my babe! You said you had the darling? You would take me to her!"

The poor lady evidently forgot all things else in the nervous excitement of the moment. Jim took his cue. He winked at his companions, and turned to the excited woman.

"You're right, ma'am. I jist did that, and no mistake. I was here last night, and wanted you to vamose with me, and I'd fotch ye to the little gal."

"You and the young lady; and you said you had my child."

"Jist so. Me and the young lady was here. But I'm desprit afeard I can't bring ye to the little gal. It's 'ginst rules, you know. S'pose I bring the little gal to you. Won't that do?"

"Oh, will you? Can you? I shall forever bless you!"

"In course I kin. Only fur a minute though. Jist to let you clap yer eyes on her."

"Bring her! Bring her! I'll follow you to the ends of the earth ere you shall take her from

me again! I shall not be afraid if I have her blessed face before me to give me courage!"

During this conversation the officer was rubbing his poll, and knowingly winking at the detective.

Suddenly the lady seemed to recover from her self-forgetfulness. She looked fearfully at the officer, and pressed her hand doubtfully to her head.

"What have I been saying?" she asked, faintly. "My head feels so strange."

"There, there, poor soul," said the officer, soothingly. "We will leave you now. You are not just yourself."

He beckoned to his companions, and backed from the room, probably thinking it a good time to do so. He closed the door gently.

"What did I tell you?" he asked, pointing meaningly to his head. "You have caught her off her balance. You can see now for yourself that she is insane. That's the subject she keeps raving on. Her child, her child, always her child."

"It looks so, that's a fact," acknowledged the detective, with a queer look at Jim.

"But the idear of her settlin' on me!" exclaimed the latter. "Why, I'd be afeard to go through this consarn. Some on 'em mought be wantin' to tumble in love with me next; or they might be takin' me fur their baby."

"They take all sorts of queer fancies," explained the officer. "Now she imagines that you came to her in the middle of the night and wanted her to escape, and that she refused. Not a very likely story."

"I've heered likelier," answered Jim. "Wonder what sort of a rooster she thinks I am, anyhow?"

There was a deep expression of surprise in the boy's face, and a look of unblushing innocence that would have done credit to an old actor.

"Good-by," he said, as they left the door. "Don't think I'll be back soon. Some o' yer old ladies will be wantin' to nuss me next; and I don't want to be nussed."

The officer laughed as he closed the door. But a different expression immediately came upon his face.

"By Jupiter. I was never taken so aback in my life!" he declared. "The old lady must be getting a twist in her brains in earnest. Lucky it happened when that sharp detective was here. He'll make a good witness on our side. The boy looked as if he might be knocked down with a feather. He is not used to mad whims."

Meanwhile the detective and his pupil were slowly receding from the asylum. When they had reached a safe distance Harry turned to the boy with a meaning look.

"Come, you young reprobate, what is behind all this?" he exclaimed. "You can't humbug me. It was no mad freak that struck Mrs. Wilkins. Come, out with it, or I'll shake it out of you!"

Jim laughed uproariously.

"It was jist as good as a play," he declared. "And didn't I carry it out neat? There she was, lettin' the whole cat out o' the bag, and me a playin' her on, like a cat plays a mouse. And that fool of a keeper thinkin' she was out

o' her brains, and I was only a-humorin' her! Oh, Lawsee! I'm ready to bu'st with it."

Jim laughed till he rolled in the grass.

"But what have you been up to?" cried the detective, stirring him up with his foot.

"Didn't she tell you?" laughed the boy. "She told the whole story as neat as a pin and skeered me 'most out o' my wits at the start. Lucky he tuk it t'other way, for craziness. It's every word true she says. I was there last night, with a young lady from the kitchen, whose name's Biddy Mulligan. It was me let loose the mad woman, by mistake. My eyes! didn't I kick up a ruction, though? But I couldn't coax Mrs. Wilkins to make a run fur it. She was skeered into a mummy. Had to dig out myself and let her alone."

"Is this so, Jim? You're learning fast, boy, hang me if you ain't! It's a confounded spite though, if you got inside and couldn't get her out. That gun's spiked. You'll have to try some other."

"Got one; all loaded and primed," averred Jim.

"Ha! what is that?"

"You see, I've got a friend inside," declared the boy. "A kitchen gal as I've been sweet on. They think there's nothing wrong, and I kin dig in ag'in when I please."

"I see. But if the woman won't come out it's all risk in vain."

"There's some hosses won't travel," explained Jim, "'cept you build a fire under 'em. Then they'll go like wild. And there's others won't go 'cept you hang a bunch o' hay afore their noses. Now, that's what I'm goin' to do with Mrs. Wilkins."

"What?"

"Hang her baby afore her nose. You heered what she said. She'd foller it to Jericho. Now you see there's Paul Wilkins's detective nosin' round all creation fur that baby, and he never dreams that it's under his nose all the time. I've got the little gal safe. And I'm goin' to take her to the 'sylum, and jist show her sweet face to Mrs. Wilkins, and you bet she'll foller me. There ain't no doubt 'bout it, whatsom-ever."

"By the Lord Harry, boy, but your education is about finished. There's nothing more I can teach you. Give me your hand."

And he grasped Jim's hand with a grip that brought tears of pain and of pride to the boy's eyes.

CHAPTER XIII.

FLINGING A SPOTTER.

JOLLY JIM was on his way home when he was stopped by a boy of his acquaintance, who made a mysterious sign which Jim recognized in an instant. It was part of that freemasonry of boys, by which they can say so much without words. Several days had passed now since the date of our last chapter, and these were days of active labor with the young detective, who had been preparing to carry out his well-matured scheme.

He turned aside into a secluded corner, in obedience to the boy's sign.

"What's up, Dick?" he asked, curiously. "Anything bu'sted on the street?"

"You'd best jist keep yer eye skinned, that's all. There's things a-brewin'. We boys all know the bizness ye're in, Jim, and we're proud o' you, and we're not goin' to let nothin' be put on you blind."

"Much obliged," answered Jim, carelessly. "Ye're a prime little feller, Dick. Let out. What's the row?"

"There's a chap been buzzin' 'round 'mong the boys, axin' where you lived, and all 'bout you. And likewise he axed if you'd been seen with a little girl."

"The blazes he did! Who was he? What sort of a lookin' gorillar?"

"A tall chap, with a little red whisker. Jerry Jones who's been 'round the perlice courts, says as how he's a officer."

Jim's face lighted up with recollection.

"Good for you, Dick!" he exclaimed. "I know him like a book. So he's nosin' round arter me, hey? Glad ye told me, 'cause all my plans mought ha' been sp'iled if I hadn't been posted. Bet you high I work a cross-cut on that coon. He ain't goin' to dismantle Jolly Jim easy, you see."

"Guess you will, Jim. Us boys has been watchin' you, and we knows as ye're up to snuff. Wish you'd tell us all 'bout it."

"Won't I, then? Can't do it now, Dick, cause there's other fish in the pan. Got to stir round lively to upset that shark. But I'll blow the whole job to you 'fore long."

With very little ceremony Jim escaped from his admiring young friend, and continued his journey.

"Tell you all 'bout it, with a hook," he muttered. "Guess I kin rig up a story to satisfy you, 'thout blowin' the secrets of the perfession. But I've got to dance round lively. That's Paul Wilkins's detective a-nosin' arter me. Wonder if he smells a rat 'bout the little gal? If he settles down on her now it'll knock all my plans into mince-meat. Got to circumvent him, somehow."

He was soon in the vicinity of his home. As he approached it he walked slowly, and used his eyes with keen observance. There was a man lounging on a corner near his domicile who attracted the boy's attention. He had grown so used to the manners of scouts and spotters that he had learned to recognize them by instinct.

"Shadowin' me, as sure as shootin'," he muttered. "Guess I'll have to lead that sharp round a bit. If they think I've got the gal at home why don't they settle on it? Mebbe they fancy I wouldn't venture that, and that I've got it hid somewhere else. All right, lovelies, ye kin foller me to the place."

Jim lounged on in the most careless fashion, brushing closely past the supposed watcher. The man's manner satisfied him that he had judged correctly. On he went, through street after street, leaving his home far behind. He stopped a moment for a chat with an acquaintance, which gave him an excuse for looking back. Sure enough there was the spotter, just slinking into a doorway. He had surmised correctly.

Ten minutes afterward Jim was running at full speed toward home. He had flung the

spotter, by a quick turn around a corner, and a dart into an alley. Shooting through to another street, he was off for home at top speed. There was no time to lose.

Jim's mother was surprised when her worthy son burst into the house, like a ball from the mouth of a cannon, and breathing heavily from the sharp spurt he had made.

"Where's the little gal?" he cried, eagerly. "Where's Lucy? Ah! there you are, lady-bug! Wrap her up in somethin' warm, mammy. And quick. I've got to slide like grease off a hot griddle. The sharks are arter us. Quick! Where's her cloak?"

The old lady held up her hand in alarm and nervousness.

"Why, Jimmy, what forever is the matter? I never see'd you go on so in my life before."

"Fun's the matter!" exclaimed Jim, bustling around himself in search of the desired garments. "They'll bu'st on us afore ten minutes, and then our cake's all dough. Ain't got time to 'splain now, but if we ain't spry we're goin' to lose the little gal. Here, little hoppity, till I wrap you up."

The excited boy began to array the child in some garments which he had caught up at random, until his mother rushed forward to stop him.

"Why, you ninny!" she cried. "The idea of you wrapping up a little doll like that in an old woman's winter cloak! And that's my market bonnet you're putting on her baby's head! Are you gone stark wild? Stop now, and let me at her."

Snatching the child from Jim's hands, the old lady bustled around, and soon had her attired in more suitable garments.

"There, now, there's some sense in that. She don't look quite like a scarecrow. I'm 'mazing sorry you've got to take her, but I s'pose you know best. Kiss me good-by, sweet."

"Where's me going?" asked the child, as she was surrendered to Jim's arms.

"To yer mammy, little one. I'm goin' to take ye to yer mammy."

"Oh, is you? To my dear mamma? I loves you."

The pleased child kissed Jim's brown face with warm affection.

"Yes, little rose-bud, that's where we're goin'. Good-by, mammy. Won't be back to-night, I reckon."

Off shot the boy and his prize, out into the street, where he hailed a cab that was passing. He was sufficiently supplied with money, and it was no time to risk a foot journey. The cabman stopped and Jim shot into the carriage, still carrying the well-bundled-up child.

"For Harlem, and let out like blazes!" he cried to the driver, as he sprung in.

He was just in time, for at that moment his late pursuer came around the neighboring street corner, only to see the boy, with a bundle suspiciously like a child step into a cab, and the latter drive furiously away.

He was left completely in the lurch. Pursuit was useless, and there was no other vehicle at hand. Jim had played the winning hand in the game.

Night was falling when the boy with his prize

entered the village near which the asylum was situated. It was two or three hours after he had escaped from under the eyes of the spotter, and the reckless boy had had many a wild laugh to himself in regard to the style in which he had discounted that individual.

"Guess he tackled the wrong persimmon-tree that time," fancied Jim. "Bet he got his mouth tied up so he can't whistle wu'th a cent."

He had taken a second cab, which had brought him out to the village. Paying the cabman, Jim advised him to put up at the village hotel and get his supper, and to wait for him, for he would want his services later in the evening.

"I'm goin' back; maybe 'bout ten, and maybe 'bout twelve o'clock," averred the boy. "Jist you keep alive and I'll be arter you when I want you. Here's the cash to buy yer supper, and I've got plenty more where that came from. And keep mum, cabby. If ye're axed any imperdent questions at the hotel, tell 'em as you've been drivin' an English lord out here to see the country."

The cabman was an old hand at his business, and answered Jim with a knowing laugh.

"They won't catch me," he declared, as he drove toward the hotel.

The boy had landed at Molly Malone's house, which he now entered. That lady, a dumpy little bunch of an Irishwoman, warmly welcomed him.

"Biddy's not here yet?" queried Jim.

"No more is she," answered Molly. "For it's afore her time, avick. Sure an' is that the little gal? Mercy o' Marry, but it's a swate little cherub she is. Come till me, ye little banshee, till I git ye out o' all that toggery. But fer marcy, what brings ye here the night? Sure it was to-morrer night as ye fixed wid Biddy."

"Told her it mou't be to-night. Had to run fur it, to keep the baby from the sharks. Got anything to eat, Molly? Me and little Lucy are as hungry as two wolves."

"Indade an' there's not overmuch in the house, but I'll mebbe be able to hunt you up a bite. Bless the swate little face!" She had now got the wraps from the child, and stood in admiration of her beauty.

"There's blood in the little fairy," she declared. "An' she's got the makin' of a rale leddy," she continued, as Lucy, who had taken to the kind-hearted woman, held up her little mouth to be kissed. "Now let me see if there's not a thrifle of 'atin' in the house."

She soon discovered a very large trifle, and when Biddy entered, a half-hour afterward, she found Jim and his diminutive *protegee* busily engaged at their supper.

"Faix an' I didn't look for ye the night," she declared.

"Have you got the key, Biddy?" asked Jim, with some anxiety.

"Indade an' I have thin. For I thought there'd be no tellin' when ye'd come, at all, at all."

"Your head's level, Biddy. Step up here and git yer supper, for I guess ye've 'arned it."

"Had my supper at the asylum 'fore I left," answered Biddy. "I'll jist look at you ate."

"Don't ye do it, or ye'll be sp'ilin' my appetite," replied the boy as he made another assault upon the viands.

The night fell dark and heavy. Thick clouds gathered upon the sky. Rain was promised, and a cool wind soughed through the trees. Jim looked with a critical eye out upon the scene. One of the great events of his life was to be performed that night, and he was studying the weather with doubtful eyes.

"Hope the rain 'll let up, but it kin blow like blazes if it wants," he muttered. "Rain'll be bad on the baby and her mother."

Lucy had fallen asleep soon after supper, and had several hours' sound slumber ere Jim felt that the time had come for their enterprises. It was eleven o'clock when they left the house, the child in Jim's arms. It had been raining hard, but fortunately no rain was falling now.

"See here, rose-bud," said Jim, warningly. "You must keep just as quiet as a mouse. I'm going to take ye to yer mammy. But if ye make any noise ye'll maybe skeer up a big giant 'stead o' yer mammy."

"Me won't say one word," declared the frightened child. "Me wants my mamma."

"Don't be after scarin' the child now," cried Biddy. "I'm ashamed o' ye, Jim. She shall have her mamma, so she shall, poor little toad."

Entrance to the house was gained as easily as on the former occasion. Silence was not so imperative, for the loud wail of the wind outside, and the groans of some adjoining pines, drowned any light sounds.

Biddy had been wise enough to leave a lamp burning low in the kitchen, so that they had no difficulty in making their way.

A brief pause was made at the foot of the stairs. They listened for any movement above, but all seemed still. The child, wrapped until she looked like an infant mummy, nestled warmly in Jim's arms, and kept as quiet as a mouse.

"The coast's clear," he announced. "Let's dig ahead. Every second counts now."

The upper corridor was gained. There was no one visible, and no suspicious sound. Without a moment's hesitation Jim hurried forward with his burden, followed closely by Biddy, who was trembling with nervous dread. She found the keys where they had been on the previous occasion. No suspicion, then, was entertained.

Jim stopped before a door.

"Sure this is it, Biddy?"

"Yes."

"So am I. Ain't goin' to take your mem'ry this time."

With a slight warning knock upon the portal, Jim applied the key, and turned it in the lock. In a moment the door was open.

"Go in, Biddy, and tell the lady there's visitors outside. And don't lose no time."

Jim waited patiently for two or three minutes, when Biddy opened the door and hastily beckoned him in. Mrs. Wilkins was up, and had quickly thrown on her dress. There was an excited, feverish look in her eyes.

"Ready to go now?" asked Jim. "The coast's clear, and we kin be out in a jiffy."

"What have you there?" she said, without

attention to his words. "You promised me my child. Oh, what is the burden you carry?"

The child quickly twisted round in Jim's arms, her face radiant with delight.

"Oh, mamma! mamma!"

"My child! My child!"

The excited mother caught the burden from Jim's arms, with the fury of some wild creature, and hugged the child to her breast, devouring her face, neck and hands with kisses.

"My own! My dear! My love! Oh, let me forever bless you for bringing me my child, my all in the world!"

"All right," cried the business-like boy. "But git's the word. Let's slide."

"No, no, I dare not! I have my child. I am content to stay here with her."

"Maybe you are. But how long will you have her arter the keepers come?"

"They shall not take her from me! No one shall take her from her!"

"They sha'n't, hey?" cried Jim, making a movement to snatch the child from the mother's arms.

He paused suddenly. His quick ears had caught some sounds without. Holding up his hand in warning he listened intently. In a moment more he quickly inserted the key and locked the door on the inside.

"Keep as still as death!" he warned, in a low tone. "They've got the alarm outside, or else they're makin' a round. Don't stir on your lives!"

All remained deathly still, the mother hugging her child with feverish dread. Steps were audible without, which rapidly approached the vicinity of the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DESPERATE EFFORT.

THE steps drew near. In breathless silence those within the room waited, hoping they would pass by, and that it was but an ordinary patrol. But to their surprise they stopped opposite the door, and the voices of two men were heard in conversation.

"It was in one of the rooms near here," said one. "I saw the figure of a boy or a man, but it vanished the instant I got sight of it."

"Maybe it was something supernatural," suggested the other. "It could be nothing alive."

"It frightened me," answered the first. "What shall we do? These rooms should be searched."

"Faith, I won't do it alone."

"And I don't care to."

"I'll tell you," suggested the other. "Let's call Joe, the watchman. He don't fear the devil. I will watch at the end of the passage while you go for him. These rooms must be searched. You remember that ugly business the other night."

"You bet I do, for the mad thing nearly throttled me. Come on. Your plan is a good one."

The sound of their departing steps resounded through the hall.

Jim looked at the two women, whose eyes were dilated with fright.

"Sure, an' what's to be done now?" asked

Biddy. "I'm skeert 'most blue. Oh, wirra, but we're trapped!"

"Fly, my good friends, and leave me with my babe," pleaded Mrs. Wilkins.

"Much we will!" cried Jim. "That'd be a neat way to fling the fat in the fire. Keep still a minute till I think."

"Faix, and you've got to think quick and lively," muttered Biddy. "The passages is all guarded, and it'll not be a second afore we have that watchman here. And he's a perfect terror. Oh, why did I come, at all, at all?"

"Hold yer whist, will you?" commanded Jim, sternly. "You mought as well be punchin' pins into a feller as talkin' that way."

A dozen schemes of escape were active in the boy's busy brain, each to be thrown aside on the instant as useless. Suddenly he clapped his hands.

"I have it!" he exclaimed. "It's bold and risky, but it's the only plan. Keep still for a minute. I have it."

Without volunteering any information, he sprung to the door, unlocked it, and took possession of the keys. Then snatching up a sheet from the bed, he wrapped himself in its white folds and darted out into the corridor. Stretching his arms like wings and waving the sheet in the air, he ran toward the sentinel, who stood at some distance up the passage. Queer, guttural sounds also came from Jim's lips.

The superstitious guard gave but one look at the phantom like figure advancing in the dim light. Then with a cry of dread he turned on his heels and fled for dear life.

"Good!" cried Jim, bunching up the sheet and flinging it after him. "Now for the balance of the job."

He was opposite the cell of the maniac whom he had formerly released. Sounds in the cell showed that she had been aroused. In an instant the daring boy had inserted the key in the lock of her door, turned it, and opened the door.

The wild, distorted face glared before him.

"Go it," cried the reckless fellow. "There's a clear track. Let her rip!"

The insane woman, excited by the opening to liberty, and by his cries, sprung into the passage. She advanced on him, with hands extended like talons. But he sprung back, exclaiming:

"None o' that now. Ain't got time for that sort o' fun. Yander's your game. Streak out, and let her rip."

At this suggestion the purpose of the maniac changed. She turned and ran down the passage, in the direction in which Jim now heard steps approaching.

"Guess I've staked out some work for ye," cried the reckless boy, as a wild yell came from the escaped lunatic. "Now to make tracks while the coast's clear."

He darted to Mrs. Wilkins's room, and flung open the door.

"Now's yer time," he exclaimed. "Foller me!"

But at this moment an unlucky spasm of fear came over the nervous lady, and she drew back crying:

"No, no! You two escape! I dare not! Leave me alone with my babe!"

"Thunder and lightning!" cried the furious boy. "This ain't no time for that sort o' stuff. Come, I say!"

He stamped the floor in his indignation.

"I cannot! I dare not!" she averred. "Go! Go! and leave me!"

"Then by the saints, you sha'n't have the baby!" yelled Jim, springing forward, and tearing the child from her arms. "You can foller or not as you want, but I'm off! Come ahead, Biddy!"

He sprung from the room, followed by Biddy. A moment the mother stood in despair; then she leaped after him, crying in piteous accents:

"Give me my babel! Oh, give me my babe!"

Luckily for them, the escaped maniac was making noise enough to drown all lesser sounds, and the uproar of a struggle could be heard, as if the keepers were seeking to capture her.

Along the corridor rushed Jim, and up the side-passage, until the stairs leading to the kitchen were gained. Looking back to see that Mrs. Wilkins was still following, he dashed down these stairs, and into the passage below. Soon the kitchen was gained. But without an instant's halt Jim pushed on, and out to the open air, the two women following.

"Lock the door, Biddy," he cried "and come on."

"My child! Let me have my child!" cried the distracted mother.

"Can't trust ye, ma'am. Follow me and keep quiet, and ye shall soon have the little critter!"

He pushed on into the darkness of the night. Biddy had taken Mrs. Wilkins's hand, and was leading her onward. There was, luckily, no rain, but the wind howled past in wild eddies. From the building behind them sounds were heard, and lights flashed from some of the windows. But there was no evidence of pursuit.

Soon the village was gained. They hastened through the deserted street until they reached Mrs. Malone's residence.

"We've got to git outer this town quick as lightnin'," averred Jim. "Here's yer baby, Mrs. Wilkins. Freeze onto the little gal. I'll have a carriage here afore five minutes."

Handing the child to the mother, who clasped it with desperate energy to her breast, while a cry of delight burst from her lips, Jim darted off again into the darkness.

In a very few minutes he was at the village hotel. He found the cabman waiting for him, according to directions.

"That's clever," he cried. "Hitch up like lightnin'. Ain't got a spare second. Stir yer stumps, old boy, for we've got to make tracks if we ever did."

The cabman was used to emergencies. Within five minutes the cab was on the street, with Jim on the box with the driver. They stopped in front of Mrs. Malone's. The women were waiting.

"Jump in, quick!" cried the boy. "You, too, Biddy. Won't be safe quarters for you here now. Jump in like fun."

In they leaped, the door was slammed to, and the horses' heads turned up the road.

"Let out!" cried Jim. "Let's see what's in them hosses!"

Off they went like a meteor through the night, the wild boy snapping his fingers at the asylum.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. WILKINS GROWS GENEROUS.

GILBERT BACON stood at the door of a modest mansion in the upper part of New York City. He had just rung the bell, and was looking at a slip of paper which he held in his hand.

"If I call here I'm to learn something to my advantage," he read. "What under the sun can it mean? Badly written and miserably spelled. I hope it's no rascally scheme. The house looks respectable. At an rate I am bound to find out what is behind this letter."

The door opened as he spoke, and a face which he recognized appeared. It was the boy whom he had met at Harry Keen's office, Jolly Jim the young detective.

"Did you send me this?" he asked, showing the letter.

"That's my signatoor," answered Jim, proudly. "Come in, Mr. Bacon."

"What does it mean? What am I to learn to my advantage?"

"Only that you owe me two thousand dollars," replied Jim, leading the way inward.

"I owe you two thousand dollars!" repeated Mr. Bacon in surprise. "I prefer to doubt that. What have you done to earn the two thousand?"

"Wasn't that what you promised me if I found the baby, and brung Mrs. Wilkins out of the 'sylum'?"

"Yes," exclaimed Mr. Bacon, his recollection returning. "I had forgotten. I am a man of my word. Prove to me that you have done it, and the money is yours."

Jim answered by flinging open a door before him.

"Peg into that there room, and maybe ye'll find the proof 'thout askin'."

The gentleman sprung forward. Before him stood two women, one bearing a child. He recognized her pale face at a glance, and leaped toward her, crying:

"My sister! Can it be possible?"

"Gilbert! My brother!" cried the sad-faced woman, her countenance lighting up with warm delight.

In a moment they were clasped in each other's arms, while the ward kiss of affection passed between them.

Jim signed to Mrs. Wilkins's attendant to leave the room, and silently closed the door upon the reunited brother and sister. Then the reckless fellow turned, with a laughing look upon his face.

"Biddy! My sweetheart!" he cried, flinging his arms around the blushing girl.

"Jim! My darlint!" answered Biddy, as she offered her lips to the boy's proffered kiss.

"We'll have that little farm yit, Biddy. I'm to git a neat little pile fur this job. Then I'm goin' to 'vest it, and I bet you I'll double it afore three years. Then we'll git married, Biddy, and we'll be the happiest couple on the island."

"Are we to wait three whole years, Jim?" asked Biddy, with pouting lips.

"Why, I'm only a boy yit, and ye're only a gal. Guess we kin squeeze it out. You'll have a prime place with Mrs. Wilkins, and I'm goin' on with my bizness. It's only like waitin' till arter dinner fer the puddin', Biddy. It's all the sweeter fer the waitin'. Here's my signatoor

that I'll be true to ye till the time comes," and he again kissed the pretty, blushing face.

But he suddenly released her as the door opened and Mr. Bacon entered.

"What do I not owe you?" he exclaimed, pressing the boy's hand warmly. "You have well earned your reward. But whose house is this? Is there danger of their being tracked here?"

"It's Harry Keen's brother's house. I calkulate all's rosy here."

"There's one thing necessary to make my sister's safety secure. I promised you five thousand if you could force Paul Wilkins to grant her a divorce. I fancy, however, you will hardly be able to accomplish that."

"Won't I then?" exclaimed Jim. "He's got to leave her the little gal too. I've got a bigger ring in his nose than you've any notion of. Good-by, Mr. Bacon. Guess I'd best hammer while the iron's hot."

Jim was off out of the house like a streak, leaving the gentleman surprised but hopeful.

Business was in Jim's mind as he hurried down-town, and sought the office of the detective. Two hours afterward he made his appearance at the establishment of the villainous merchant, and was shown back into the office, in which Paul Wilkins sat writing.

He looked up with surprise and displeasure as the boy entered, and seated himself with an independent air.

"What brings you here again?" exclaimed the angry merchant. "By Heavens, this is too much! Leave now, instantly. I'll stand no more of your impertinence."

"Heered anything from the 'sylum to-day?" asked Jim, carelessly.

"Ha!" cried the merchant, looking up with suspicious eyes. "My wife was stolen from there last night! Is it possible that you—"

"It's mighty possible," interrupted Jim, with easy assurance. "I'm one of them kind. But that's not what brung me here to day. You've got yer pen in yer fingers, and 'twon't be much trouble to put your name to this little dokyment."

He coolly laid a written paper on the desk before Mr. Wilkins.

The latter had half-risen, with his eyes blazing with rage; but he cast a glance on the paper, and at once became absorbed in its contents.

"By the Lord, there's somebody deeper than you behind this!" he hissed. "I am to sign a consent to give my wife a divorce and the custody of the child. Hang me, if that isn't rich! What fool is at the bottom of this, and what does he expect?"

"He s'pects that you'll sign it," answered Jim, coolly.

"He does, eh?"

The angry man snatched up the paper with intent to tear it into fragments.

"Don't!" cried Jim, lifting his hand in warning. "Had to pay a lawyer two dollars for writin' that dokyment, and there's no use in your sp'ilin' it. It's no baby of a job, now I tell you, and I ain't got no two dollars to waste in writin' another."

"Why, you or your employer did not imagine for a moment that I would sign such a paper?"

The merchant had grown calm through sheer surprise.

"Jist so," answered Jim, carelessly. "'Cause you see, if you don't you'll git yerself into trouble, and mighty quick, too!"

"What do you mean?"

Mr. Wilkins's hand slightly shook as he laid down the paper.

"I mean this," said Jim, rising and confronting him with a stern expression. "I mean you'll be hauled up into court for forgery afore you're a day older, if you don't come up to the scratch with that paper. We're not fools, now you bet; and we've got a wrinkle ag'in' you as'll squeeze you lively."

"You lie, you wharf rat! I defy your plot! Take that answer back to your employer."

"Guess I ain't got no employer," answered Jim. "I'm my own boss in this job. But jist look here, Mr. Wilkins, you was very kind to Jack Masters t'other day in paying a thousand dollar forgery fur him: s'posed I didn't know what he was arter, hey? Calkulate you don't do that often to keep forgers out o' prison, do ye?"

The merchant had fallen back in his chair, with a pale look on his face. Jim's blow had struck him heavy.

"You needn't explain why you did it," continued the boy, "'cause I know all about it, and there's no use stirrin' up lies. It was 'cause Jack Masters done a forgery for you. Stuck your wife's name to a little bit o' paper, which is in the Recorder's office now. How's that, Mr. Wilkins?"

"It's a lie!" gasped the pallid villain.

"Not much. It's there, and it's going to stay there. What's more, Jack Masters is under our thumb, and we kin squeeze the hull story out o' him in a minute. If you don't b'lieve me say the word, and I'll fetch him here to tell you so hisself. Secondarily, Mrs. Wilkins is ready to swear that she never put her fingers to the signatoor. You hear me, Mr. Wilkins. I'm in sound earnest. Sure's you're livin' if you don't sign that paper we'll snatch you up for forgery—and prove it on you, too."

The merchant was as pale as death. His face twitched and his hands trembled with nervous dread. He choked as he tried to speak.

"But—but—if I sign it?"

"If you do you kin have the fun of withdrawing the paper from the Recorder's office and burnin' it."

"But—then I will lose the property which it assigns to me."

"Jist so. You put yer hand in yer wife's pocket to steal her little fortune. You kin pull it out again empty."

Mr. Wilkins sat trembling like a leaf, his face working with mingled fear and rage. Suddenly he seized the pen and dashed his signature to the foot of the paper. He then crumpled this up and flung it wildly at his tormentor.

"There! Now leave my office instantly! If you stay here longer I may do you a harm!"

"Duuno as I've got any other bizness," answered Jim, securing the valuable document. "I'll jist put my name here as witness to the signatoor. Good-day Mr. Wilkins. That for-

ged dokymment stays in the Recorder's office till this divorce is put through. Then you kin have it out."

"What?" cried the merchant hastily.

"You didn't calkulate we'd let you have it sooner, and then go back on your word? Nary time, Mr. Paul Wilkins. Me and my employer has got our eye-teeth cut. When Mrs. Wilkins gits her divorce, and has her baby signed over to her, you kin burn the paper that you wanted to rob her of her property with, and not a minute before. And take keer how you kick, or we'll squeeze you yit. Good-by, Mr. Wilkins."

And Jim walked out of the office, with his hat very much on one side.

There is no need to detail at length the events that followed this momentous interview. The application for the divorce was made, with the consent of both parties. Under the circumstances there was no difficulty in the way, and the court readily granted it, the plea being offered of false imprisonment of the wife.

The custody of the child was also granted to Mrs. Wilkins, with her late husband's consent. This done the forged deed was withdrawn from the Recorder's office and destroyed, Mr. Wilkins declaring that, though his wife had freely made over her property to him, he would scorn to keep it under the circumstances.

This generosity was very effective, and many innocent persons fancied that Mr. Wilkins had done a noble act, for which if he had his just dues he would have a public monument.

Jolly Jim stuck his tongue in his cheek and said nothing. He had pledged himself to silence.

Four years have passed since then, and there is a marked change in the circumstances of our parties. Mr. Bacon had kept his word in paying Jim the reward promised. He had done more, and so shrewdly invested it for him as to nearly double the sum. During this time Biddy had continued to live with Mrs. Wilkins, who had become a cheerful and happy person again.

But four years brought Jim well up from boyhood into manhood, and, like the honest fellow that he was, he claimed Biddy's hand in marriage, according to his old promise.

The loving girl was very ready and willing, for she really thought that the sun set in Jim's pocket. It would be hard to-day to find a livelier and happier married pair, with their little farm in the country, on which Jim had kept his eye for years, and with their pigs and poultry, and their little "patch of praties."

Mrs. Wilkins lives near them, and little Lucy, now grown to be a beautiful girl of some eight years of age, insists on spending half her time at Jim's cottage, for she has not lost her old fancy for the lively boy who had danced her in his arms when she was little more than a baby.

Jim is still engaged in his old business, however, and continues to have a desk in Harry Keen's office, though the detective affirms that his apprentice has long since learned his business, and is competent to hold his own with any journeyman on the force. In fact, it would be hard to find a sharper and shrewder thief-catcher than him whom we have known in his boyhood as Jolly Jim, the young detective.

THE END.

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